



Porous borders and illicit arms deal: Implication for Nigeria national security

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Abstract

The intricate relationship between porous borders and illicit arms deals could be seen in the exacerbation of existing security threats: kidnapping, banditry, insurgency, armed conflict, and violent crimes, and this extensively queries the national security of Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this study employed structural functionalism theory to interrogate Nigeria's national security implications through porous borders and illicit arms deals. This study engaged qualitative research design with reliance on existing literature, government reports, and relevant case studies. Findings that emanate from the study submitted that porous borders, apart from economic threats of counterfeit products, hinder development and loss of government revenues, aggravate the smuggling of illicit goods of drugs and weapons, and this contraband fuels organised crime, which undermines state authority. Results from the study also opine that implications of illicit arms deals encompass not only the direct impact on armed violence and conflict but also broader socioeconomic consequences, such as undermined governance and compromised human security. This study recommends that States should invest in policies to enhance border security by investing in modern border infrastructure of surveillance systems and detection equipment and fostering border community engagement. The study also recommends strengthening institutional capacities for arms tracing and tracking. Finally, the study recommends fostering regional and international cooperation to combat illicit arms cartels effectively via information-sharing platforms and joint border patrols.

Keywords: Illicit Arms Deal, National Security, Porous Border, Structural Functionalism theory

Introduction

The end of the Cold War generated worldwide optimism for international peace, stability, and development. This optimism has turned into a mirage on account of the ready availability of SALW that has been fuelling civil wars, organised crimes, and insurgency across the globe. The emergence of insurgent threats in the international system and the increasing role of non-state actors armed with small arms, also known as Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), have recently increased the importance accorded to national security by nations. In Africa and the West African sub-region, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other neighbouring countries have been devastated by the proliferation of SALW, which has attendant consequences on the country's national security (Diawara, 2017).

States are recognised under international law based on their capability to secure their borders/territories and protect their citizens. According to Okumu (2011), African countries are increasingly facing daunting tasks of managing their borders in ways that secure their territorial sovereignty/integrity, ensure that they are bridges rather than barriers for cross-border cooperation and regional integration, prevent illegal entries and

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exiting of people and goods while allowing easy movement of goods and people, allows relatives to visit their kin while keeping away criminals (such as drug and human traffickers, terrorists, etc) and facilitates tourists to cross while keeping out terrorists easily. The challenges facing African states in managing their borders are compounded by globalisation tearing down traditional borders through technological advancement and the transformation of international relations.

Nigeria is a vast country that covers 923,768 square kilometres with about 36,450 kilometres of land and waters/maritime borders. Nigeria is situated in the Gulf of Guinea and shares a border with Benin Republic in the West, Niger and Chad in the North, and Cameroon in the North-east and South-south. It shares lake borders with Chad and Niger and Maritime borders with the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria has sea, air, and land borders, with land entry points constituting over 99% of the borders, followed by airports. The Vastness of Nigeria's border necessitates the need for effective management and control of her borders for national security (Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016).

Nigeria's permeable porous borders are the product of post-colonial governments upholding the division of Africa by colonial powers. The scramble for Africa began with the Berlin Conference (1884–85) and ended by the early twentieth century. During this period, European colonisers partitioned Africa into spheres of influence, colonies, and various segments for political and economic goals. They partitioned land from European capitals, with limited knowledge of the geography, history, and ethnic composition of Africa. In many African countries, a significant portion of their population belongs to groups split by colonial partitions (Gashaw, 2017).

Okafor (2021) estimated that there are over a billion small guns in circulation worldwide, with 87.5 per cent of them in civilian hands. The 2018 Small Arms Research estimates that people in various African countries own 40,009,000 small arms. In Nigeria, easy access to small arms and ammunition has led to widespread violence, kidnappings, robberies, mass killings, and social unrest. Nigeria is estimated to host over 70 per cent of about 8 million illegal weapons in West Africa (Edeko, 2011). Concerningly, small arms and other lethal weapons are readily available in Nigerian markets because of the porosity of Nigeria's borders as well as the weak security system. The availability and accessibility of these weapons by non-state actors are responsible for the various forms of criminal activities witnessed nationwide (Achumba et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the consequence of porous borders and illicit arms dealing could be seen as weak border controls allowing for the illicit movement of goods, including counterfeit products and smuggled commodities, which undermine legitimate businesses, tax revenues, and a state's economic stability.

Inadvertently, porous borders increase the risk of the cross-border spread of infectious diseases, environmental hazards, and other public health concerns, posing additional security challenges (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

It therefore suffices to say that small arms and light weapon proliferation is widely considered to be a serious threat to national security to any individuals, groups, and nations. Kelvin (2007) maintained that the availability of illicit arms, which are largely smuggled from porous borders, feeds insurgencies, terrorism, organised crime, drug and human trafficking, internal uprisings, and civil wars, all of which make it difficult to maintain stable peace and security. Little internal uprisings frequently turn into large-scale civil wars, which have the power to destabilise a whole region.

Research Objectives

- i. Examine implications of porous borders on national security in Nigeria.
- ii. Interrogate the influence of illicit arms deals on national security in Nigeria.
- iii. Identify measures to address the challenges of porous borders and illicit arms on national security in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Porous Borders

Borders are a nation's or state's territorial sovereignty. According to Gerstein et al. (2018), national borders are the physical boundaries of a state where the state government has full legal authority over all activities, structures, and residents living within those limits. Nigeria is bordered by four francophone countries, namely, Niger Republic by the north, Cameroon, Chad by the south, and Benin Republic by the west.

The online Collins dictionary looks at the words separately, stating porous as something with many small holes in it, which water and air can pass through, while the border refers to the dividing line between two countries or regions as the dividing line between them.

Recently, globalisation prompted nations to open their borders, forming distinct political, cultural, and socioeconomic domains inside each nation that came together to form regional agreements and other transnational activities. However, Africa's history of border porosity dates back to the colonial era and the second administration, which occurred when the continent's nations gained their independence. Before African nations gained independence, Africa was more about defining a sphere of influence for political and economic reasons than drawing borders. However, colonial administrations drew borders without considering the African people's socio-cultural foundations or explaining why Africans were dispersed across borders (Akinyemi, 2013).

Illicit Arms

There are various dimensions of illicit arms by various scholars; generally speaking, illicit arms refer to weapons and firearms that are used in illegal activities, often violating local, national, and international laws and regulations. The United Nations Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) defines illicit trafficking as: “The import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement, or transfer of firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition from or across the territory of a country in violation of existing regulations.

According to EUROPOL (2022), the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) is a modest-in-size market. It remains closely linked with further illegal activities. It is a supplementary rather than a primary source of income for organised criminal groups and thus indicates the main sources of illegal weapons as:

- i. The reactivation of neutralised weapons;
- ii. Burglaries and thefts;
- iii. The embezzlement of legal arms;
- iv. The selling of legal arms on the illegal market, including the Dark-net;
- v. The reactivation of decommissioned army or police firearms;
- vi. The conversion of gas pistols.

In the same vein, Darwish (2022) stressed the commerce and physical transfer of conventional arms, including their parts, accessories, and ammunition, highlighting that the trade violates local and international laws, whether by states or non-state entities. Meanwhile, The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (2022) underpins arms trafficking to be closely linked to human trafficking smuggling, illicit trade of non-renewable resources, violent crime in Latin America and Africa, and drug trafficking in Europe.

Security and National Security explained

Security is as old as humanity; hence, understanding the concepts varies from individual to country and even internationally. Thus, security simply implies protection from violence and the provision of basic needs. At the national level, this could be seen as the protection of citizens and the territorial integrity of a country. In contrast, it could mean the acquisition of power at the international level. Based on this, Williams and McDonald (2018) identified two security philosophies to validate the meaning of security: First, security is associated with the accumulation of power such as property, money, weapons, armies, and territory. This is also known as the state-centric approach to security. The second sees security as being

emancipated and is concerned with justice and the provision of human rights, also known as the human-centric approach. This is largely because threats like extreme poverty, sickness, high unemployment, natural catastrophes, terrorism, and insurgency changed how security is thought of after the end of the Cold War.

Thus, based on the two philosophies of security outlined above, this research has adopted the human approach to security, which emphasises people's well-being. The United Nations Human Development Report (1994) further categorises seven dimensions of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environment security, personal security, community security, and political security.

On his part (Stuart, 2008) opined that the concept of national security gained prominence after the Pearl Harbor attack on the United States and other events that led to World War II and the eventual passing of the United States of America's National Security Act of 1947. This, therefore, aligned with the state-centric approach to security, associated with the accumulation of power such as property, money, weapons, armies, and territory. No wonder Longsley (2021) defines national security as the ability of a country's government to protect its citizens, economy, and other institutions.

This study has therefore adopted the definition of Longsley (2021) as it goes beyond the obvious protection against military attacks but takes cognisance of national security in the 21st century to include several non-military missions such as:

- a. Economic Security: Safeguarding economic stability and prosperity.
- b. Political Security: Ensuring the stability of political institutions.
- c. Energy Security: Protecting access to energy resources.
- d. Homeland Security: Defending against domestic threats.
- e. Cybersecurity: Guarding against cyber-attacks.
- f. Human Security: Focusing on individual well-being.
- g. Environmental Security: Addressing environmental challenges.

Empirical Review

Porous Borders, Illicit Arms Deals and National Security

Jibrin and Abdullahi (2022) examined the implications of porous borders on security and the economy of northern Nigeria. The study adopted the secondary data sources while the migration theory was adopted. The study submitted that Nigeria has over one thousand illegal routes through which aliens access her porous border, raising an increase in various categories of crime from terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping,

arms banditry, militancy, Oil bunkering, and farmers/herders conflicts. The study was a regional study on northern Nigeria, and this study is a Nigerian countrywide research project.

Okoye and Chukwurah (2022) engaged the failed state theory to interrogate porous borders and armed proliferation as Nigeria's endless security dilemma. A qualitative approach was adopted for the study, and a secondary method of eliciting data from textbooks, journals, articles, published and unpublished works, and the internet. The link between porous borders, arms proliferation, and insecurity allows for the unrestricted flow of small guns into and out of Nigeria, with the majority of these weapons ending up in the hands of non-state actors who use them to stir up trouble and render society unfriendly, ungoverned, and unsafe. This study's theoretical framework is the failed state theory. The findings of the study revealed that border porosity caused food shortages in the northeast, which aggravated many into kidnappings and banditry. The study is very important as it addresses the nature of Nigerian borders inherited from the colonial masters as one of the reasons for the porous borders. Thus, redesigning the new borders approach is very apt for this study.

Mungadi et al. (2020) engaged routine activities theory in a thematic study approach to assess the roadmap to tackling insurgency, armed banditry and kidnapping in the North West region of Nigeria as occasioned by porous borders and arms proliferation. Findings from the study revealed that deployment of techno-driven surveillance over the expanse of porous borders, strengthened collaborative efforts of law enforcement agencies and telecoms operators, genuine activation of good governance and adoption of a community participatory policing strategy can significantly reduce insurgency, armed banditry and kidnapping in the North West region. The study submitted that the North West insurgence calls for a multipronged approach with States, Federal and international communities to subdue the armed groups, protect communities across the vast ungoverned territory and exterminate the nexus of jihadist activities in the Lake Chad region of North Eastern Nigeria.

Drivers of Porous Borders, Illicit Arms Deals and National Security

Baran (2020) leveraged an exploratory study to analyse the spike in the engagement of private military and security companies (mercenaries) by fragile States, particularly by those in the Middle East and Africa, as States are seen outsourcing one of their essential functions which is the monopoly on the use of force due to cost efficiency, political non-liability or quicker and more qualified military service procurement. Mercenaries are hired as pilots, co-pilots or flight engineers for the transport of weapons, as arms salespeople in the field or as instructors in the use of the weapons and military material that have been sold, and to train troops or paramilitary groups, which in many cases comprise raw recruits, persons with little training or knowledge. All these further exacerbate arms proliferation as most are left in loose hands.

Sambo et al. (2020) engaged the triangulation research approach to analyse the link between illicit arms deals and the worsening armed conflicts in the Northeastern part of Nigeria. The study engaged both selected informants for an interview alongside reviews of available literature on the subject matter of study. Findings from the study showed that easy access to Small Arms and Light Weapons extensively aggravated armed conflicts across the Northeast, which manifested in the Boko Haram insurgency, armed banditry, ethno-religious conflicts, kidnappings and farmers-herders conflict in the region. This is a very relevant study but did not consider the impact of proximity to the Sahelian countries, ungoverned spaces and illicit artisanal mining, which this study considers.

Adekola et al. (2022) engaged State fragility theory to examine the effect of prevalence of armed non-state actors on arms proliferation and terrorism in Nigeria. The study was driven by secondary data, of which literature was obtained through searches in the publicly available material. Literature from non-serial publications, official reports, and conferences has been included, particularly if other references concerning terrorism and arms proliferation have been cited. Findings from the study revealed that the prevalence of armed non-state actors influences small and light weapons proliferation.

Moses and Abbiyesuku (2020) engaged in content analysis to interrogate the effect of the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in West Africa and insecurity. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants, newspapers, books, journals, and relevant online materials. The study submitted that flows of foreign fighters from one extremist group to the other encourage arms proliferation and terrorism. The study showed that terrorist groups now request the services of professionals for improvised explosive device (IED) production and usage, and such professionals are seen being moved from one terror cell to the other. The study focused on West Africa; therefore, there is a need for a similar study to be carried out in Nigeria.

Oladejo (2022) explained border security as a cultural crisis in southwestern Nigeria, which sought to establish the veracity or otherwise of the claim to signpost possible implications via a security lens. The study adopted a descriptive design to analyse elicited data. Results from the study indicated a faded culture of border security. They affirmed six genres of organised crimes: human trafficking, vehicle smuggling, smuggling of contraband goods, smuggling of small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, and migrant smuggling, perpetrated at varying degrees with contributory causes being border porosity, ignorance of the crimes, lucrative nature of the crimes, poverty and unemployment. The study underscores poverty and employment as some of the contributory drivers of porous borders and illicit arms deals in the country. The study was a regional work, while this study will engage a country-wide study.

Ngomba (2022) engaged the theory of transnationalism in a qualitative study to highlight the challenges in international borderlines and implications for national security at the Nigeria-Niger borders. This study sourced data from secondary sources, which were analysed qualitatively. The study revealed the drivers of porous borders and small arms conflict, inadequate cooperation among security agencies, globalisation, corruption, and inadequate facilities and logistics. The study opined that the greatest challenge facing Nigeria today is international terrorism, aided by the porosity of borderline and cross-border security challenges and religious extremism. While this study is a cross-country study of Nigeria and the Niger Republic, this study is a Nigeria-specific review.

Malami et al. (2018) engaged in a qualitative study to investigate the nexus between legal contests and the proliferation of small and light weapons in Nigeria. The empirical studies cut across legal publications and extant literature on secondary disposition. Findings from the study showed that there exists a lacuna in the legal and institutional frameworks of the present Firearms Act 1959, coupled with the inability of the government to establish a National Commission on SALW as a major clog in the country having a far-reaching effect in the strides against the proliferation of small arms. The study, though country-specific, did not consider the outstripping demands by civilians for firearms, which this study considers.

Ayuba and Okafor (2015) empirically explored the connection between the massive flow of small arms and light weapons and the revolutionary Arab Spring and the Maghreb. Findings established that, indeed, small arms and light weapons within African countries extensively ignite and sustain violent conflicts within once peaceful national territorial entities. The study concluded that the need to come up with a strong judicial system to criminalise all criminality acts of gun-running such that governments can no longer afford to pay lip service to fortifications of her border. The study is a cross-country study, and results that emanated from it cannot be used for country-specific studies like Nigeria because the operational environment differs in terms of regulation, supervision and operation.

Strategic Approach to porous Borders, Illicit Arms deals and National Security

Shidali et al. (2023) appraised porous border, terrorism, and national security in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary data and the author's observations while adopting the rational choice theory. Findings from the study revealed that the infiltrations of unregistered men and weapons, including money, into the county have aided the threats posed by terrorism to Nigerian national security. The study submitted that Nigeria should collaborate with her neighbours and adopt technologies to manage her borders and fight terrorism.

In emphasising insecurity along Nigeria's border communities in Borno state, Ishaku et al. (2023) engaged state fragility theory on the political economy of Borno State. The study employed qualitative research with

reliance on related academic publications, government reports, and available archive documents. Findings from this study showed that the emergence and sustenance of ungoverned spaces by terror cell groups in Borno State positively influence the menace of insecurity as aggravated by porous borders due to the absence of community-driven policy that dislodges all ungoverned spaces from the terror cell groups and leases the same out for value-chain agro production to prospective Arab farmers. The study concluded that the government should approach the hearts and minds of the Borno residents with good governance to counter ill governance narratives against it by terror cell groups. The study focused on addressing insecurity along Borno border communities, while this study will focus on Nigeria as country-specific.

The need to engage regional and international strategic partners in combating insecurity in the maritime domain attracted the works of Msheliza et al. (2023), whose study interrogated maritime security challenges of the Gulf of Guinea using regime theory. The study employed a quantitative research design; data were elicited through an administered questionnaire using the scientific sampling technique of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Findings from the study showed that less patronage of space-based technology harms the maritime domain. Findings also revealed that the inability to harmonise the legal framework encourages maritime criminality. The recommended states and international partners should evolve an integrated space-based technology to jointly battle maritime crimes; as such, an integrated web approach could overwhelm criminals within the maritime industry. The study also recommended that harmonisation of existing International and Regional laws with relevant State laws on kidnapping, illicit arms deals on firearms, and money laundering should be taken seriously among countries in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly Nigeria, such that uniformity in penalties should be pursued to avoid any of the states magnetising maritime crimes.

Ebaye and Bassey (2021) adopted the social contract theory to examine porous borders and weapons proliferation as a threat to Nigeria's Security. The study elicited data by administering structured questionnaires, which were analysed using simple percentage analysis and supported with the chi-square analytical methodology to arrive at a scientific and valid conclusion. The study states that due to globalisation, many developing states, including Nigeria, have seen their borders become weak, porous, and ill-policed, partly made possible by the many illegal entry points. The Nigerian border has been infiltrated by the inflow of small arms and light weapons, crime syndicates, terrorists, etc, which have caused devastating security issues.

Theoretical Framework

Structural Functionalism Theory

This study adopted the Structural Functionalism Theory (SFT), also known as functional-structural analysis, a prominent classical sociological perspective developed by Almond and Powell in 1966. SFT operates at the macro level, focusing on large-scale social structures and institutions. According to this theory, each institution, relationship, role, and norm within a society serves a purpose. Furthermore, each of these components is indispensable for the continued existence of others and for society as a whole (Britannica, 2024). Since SFT views society as a complex system where different parts (institutions, norms, roles) work together to maintain stability and solidarity, each component has a specific function, and their interdependence ensures the overall functioning of society. Second, allowing unauthorised movement of goods, people, and weapons implies that the various institutions with such responsibility have failed, making this theory applicable to the country. Illicit arms involve illegal trafficking, diversion, and production of firearms (Fife, 2020).

Thus, it is asserted that Nigeria faces the challenges of containing the substantial number of weapons in circulation due to its porous borders, which lead to national security concerns and the smuggling of weapons to non-state actors such as the Boko Haram elements, Bandits, kidnappers, sea pirates, and all manners of criminals. Arms Diversion: Attacks on national stockpiles (Boko Haram) and rogue officials diverting arms.

Fife argues that the thrust of SFT could be seen in its merits as SFT strongly emphasises how crucial socialisation is to meet societal demands. It guarantees that the upcoming generation receives the knowledge, values, culture, and anticipated behaviour. The importance placed on family by SFT cannot be ignored as it emphasises families as the fundamental units that make up society and how they transmit common values and conventions while, according to SFT, socialisation and social structure reduce societal conflicts. Criticisms against SFT could be seen from its drawbacks, as SFT tends to be too upbeat by ignoring unhealthy relationships and presuming that family life is usually pleasant and content. This is compounded as it disregards other family structures and concentrates mostly on the nuclear family. Another major disconnect of SFT is its assumptions about values and norms that could not apply in varied societies and gross neglect of Non-Family Institutions, as SFT emphasises the family too much and downplays the importance of other institutions (Newer Mind, 2023). Despite the demerits, understanding the interplay between porous borders and illicit arms through a structural functionalist lens helps identify areas for intervention, policy formulation, and international cooperation (Egbuta, 2019).

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research design by using the content analysis of secondary sources of data on previous works on porous borders and illicit arms deals, an implication to Nigeria's national security

through review of various publications, literature from non-serial publications, official reports, articles, books, conference proceedings, Newspapers, and other relevant documents that assisted researcher to have relevant information on the subject matter, particularly if other references in term of porous borders, illicit arms deals and national security have cited them.

Discussion of Findings

The literature review reveals that porous borders, apart from economic threats of counterfeit products, hindered development and loss of government revenues, also aggravate the smuggling of illicit goods of drugs, weapons, and contraband and fuel organised crime, undermining state authority. The rationale for this finding could be that most illicit activities occasioned by porous borders magnetise organised crimes and loss of government revenue as most cottage industries are extensively vulnerable, further impacting a state's gross domestic product. The finding is in tandem with the findings in the previous works of Jibrin and Abdullahi (2022), Okoye and Chukwurah (2022), Mungadi et al. (2020)

On the drivers of Illicit arms deals and national security implications as posited by the study's second objective. Analysis that emanates from the literature review also situated that implications of illicit arms deals encompass not only the direct impact on armed violence and conflict but also broader socio-economic consequences, such that it undermined governance and compromised human security. The rationale for this finding could be seen in the exacerbation of violent crimes across the country, the rush for personal firearms in thirst for self-defence, and the audacity of non-state armed actors to conform and overrun law enforcement agencies' formations. The discovery of this work is in alignment with the findings in the previous works of Baran (2020); Sambo et al. (2020); Adekola et al. (2022); Moses & Abbiyesuku (2020); Oladejo (2022); Ngomba (2022); Malami, et al. (2018); Ayuba and Okafor (2015).

There is a dire need for a strategic approach to mitigate porous borders, illicit arms deals, and national security. Emerging literature and analysis of findings posit the need for border community-driven policy that could dislodge ungoverned spaces, engagement and patronage of space-based border patrol technology, and collaborative regional and international efforts to dislodge the grips of terror cell groups and other non-state arm actors that magnetise illicit arms deals and border activities. The findings of this work correlate with earlier submissions of Shidali et al. (2023), Ishaku et al. (2023), Msheliza et al. (2023), Ebaye and Bassey (2021)

Conclusion

The main focus of this essay is how porous borders affect Nigeria's national security. Porosity borders have caused an uncountable number of small guns to enter the hands of non-state actors, posing a variety of threats to Nigeria's national security. Among the issues with national security mentioned in the documents

are the rise in insurgency brought on by Boko Haram and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB, ISWAP). It is also critical to note that because of permeability, economic miseries are exacerbated by corruption and poor government. These factors make border management between Nigeria and her neighbours appear to be a significant difficulty.

Some of the identified implications of illicit arms and porous borders on Nigerian national security are kidnapping, militancy, farmers-heads conflict, terrorism, amongst others, caused by poverty, the lucrative nature of arms smuggling, corruption, and inadequate cooperation among security agencies. The study concluded with a recommendation geared toward closing the porosity of the Nigerian borders, leading to an influx of small arms.

Recommendations

The following are hereby recommended:

- i. Nigeria should enhance border security by investing in modern border infrastructure, including surveillance systems and detection equipment, and fostering engagement of border communities.
- ii. Nigeria should strengthen institutional capacities for arms tracing and tracking. This contrasts with the present arrangement of the presidential task force for combating arms proliferation.
- iii. Nigeria should foster regional and international cooperation to combat illicit arms cartels effectively via information-sharing platforms.

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