

Climate change impacts: exploring the rising climate-security nexus in Pakistan

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Abstract:

This research aims to bring to the fore the climate security nexus in Pakistan. According to this study, the anthropogenic climate change in Pakistan has been a probable cause of internal migrations that have played an important role in exacerbating the existing conflicts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh, and Balochistan provinces. The climate security nexus in Pakistan is established through a deductive approach using the lens of environmental security and political ecology. The study plays a crucial role in shaping Pakistani policy-making circles, providing insights into climate change mitigation, conflict-sensitive adaptation, and societal resilience. The study adopts an exploratory approach using primary and secondary data sources with semi-structured interviews and multidisciplinary assessment to analyse the issue comprehensively and provide accurate findings. The study concludes that the anthropogenic climate change-induced internal migration exacerbating armed conflict in the Pakistani regions of KP and Balochistan has the potential to cause significant economic losses in the future. It argues that the migration triggered by resource scarcity due to climate change can lead to armed conflict and provide fertile grounds for militant groups to gain strength.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, global attention has increasingly focused on the intricate relationship between climate change and its impact on armed conflicts, particularly in regions vulnerable to environmental shifts. Pakistan, which lies at the junction of geopolitical tensions and environmental vulnerability, has a convoluted challenge. Being an extremely vulnerable country to climate change, it faces a variety of climate-related risks, such as water scarcity, food insecurity, and natural catastrophes. These stressors from the environment not only affect livelihoods and create socioeconomic inequities but also bring rivalry for scarce natural assets, increasing the possibility of armed conflict. Alongside its long-standing concerns of terrorism, sectarian bloodshed, and political instability, Pakistan is dealing with the exacerbated impacts of climate change. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize and critically evaluate the findings from the research on the subtle interaction between climate change and armed conflict in the context of Pakistan.

The relationship between climate change and armed conflict provides an intricate network of cause and effect, with environmental triggers acting as catalysts to exacerbate pre-existing social, economic, and political discords. Climate-induced changes such as extreme weather events, water scarcity, and food insecurity can escalate into conflict drivers in the absence of effective governance mechanisms in place to efficiently manage natural resources. Recognizing the nature of these connections is critical for developing effective policy solutions that reduce risks of conflict and increase durability. The geographical location of Pakistan, featuring different landscapes encompassing coastal plains and mountainous regions, makes it extremely susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change. The country has numerous problems with the environment, notably recurring floods, droughts, and melting glaciers. These stresses on the environment put a strain on essential resources like fresh water and agricultural land, thereby aggravating socioeconomic gaps and increasing the possibility of unrest. The intensifying consequences of environmental degradation exacerbate present security problems, offering a tremendous challenge to Pakistan's stability and growth.

Although academic concern regarding the link between climate change and armed conflict has globally proliferated, there is still a significant deficit in the scholarship that addresses Pakistan's particular environment. This research effort is an attempt to fill this knowledge gap by carrying out a comprehensive inquiry into the impact of climate change on armed conflict in Pakistan from 2010 to 2022. Therefore, it aims to expand the knowledge of the key drivers of conflict in Pakistan by investigating the complicated relationship between stresses of the environment and sociopolitical processes and guide evidence-based policy responses.

1.2. Scope of the study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the complexities and interrelationships between climate change and armed conflict in Pakistan. The study

contributes to providing ideas for conflict-sensitive adaptation and societal resilience to mitigate the challenges of anthropogenic climate change and armed conflict in Pakistan.

1.3. Research questions

The research questions for the study are: (a) Why is climate change related to armed mobilization in Pakistan? (b) How can resource scarcity and migration triggered by climate change contribute to the emergence/strengthening of militant mobilization in Pakistan? (c) What implications of climate-induced conflicts can be for human security in Pakistan?

1.4. Research objectives

The research objectives for the study are: (a) To explore the role of climate change in the mobilization of armed conflict in Pakistan; (b) To investigate the contributing factors in the emergence of militant mobilization in Pakistan due to climate change; (c) To analyse the key mechanisms through which climate change impacts armed conflict in Pakistan and provide possible solutions for future security and stability.

2. Literature review

Future wars will be those of communal survival, aggravated or, in many cases, caused by environmental scarcity. These wars will be subnational, meaning that it will be hard for states and local governments to protect their own citizens physically. This is how many states will ultimately die. (Kaplan, 1994)

Many experts have claimed that climate change would unswervingly lead to increased armed violence because resource shortages and mass migration will lead to conflicts over resource-rich regions and unstable governments (Dixon, 2007). Climate change, according to Homer-Dixon, will contribute to "insurgencies, genocide, guerrilla attacks, gang warfare, and global terrorism (Gleditsch &Theisen, 2008)." It is particularly pertinent that confrontations and hostilities are increasingly taking place in the world's poor and weak countries, which are also expected to be the most hit by climate change (Gleditsch &Theisen, 2008). In anticipation of this threat, militaries around the globe are increasingly viewing climate change as a national security concern (The Observer, 2004). The literature appears to endorse this, with studies suggesting that temperature fluctuations indeed lead to increases in armed conflicts, with an additional one per cent in temperature increasing the likelihood of civil wars (Notaras, 2009). According to the UNDP's Human Development Report from 2011, an estimated 40% of internal conflicts over the last 60 years are linked to natural resources, and at least 18 violent conflicts have been fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources and other aspects of the environment since 1990 (UNDP, 2011).

Looking at security through the lens of climate change introduces a whole new idea in traditional security. This climate security nexus widens the scope of conventional national security to include human and ecological security and international security to include “planetary security (Vuori, 2023)”. The tools in the arsenal of traditional states for mitigating state security run short of the much-needed planetary security. Instead, the presence of tanks, jets, bullets, bombs, and guns is a source of exacerbating it. Planetary security can be achieved by acquiring weapons in the form of greening technologies, that lessen the anthropogenic footprints in the natural environment of planet earth. The environmental threats to state security are a fairly recent discovery, and not all the states consider embracing the idea of the climate–security nexus wholeheartedly as can be seen in the national policies of the US, EU, and China. They have tried to accept the idea based on differentiation---picking and choosing what suits them better according to their circumstances.

The idea of the climate–security nexus came to prominence in 2003 in the security strategies of the Pentagon and EU Council. The concept got impetus into the limelight when the former US Vice President Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) were awarded the Nobel Prize raising global awareness about climate change. Since then, there has been a plethora of literature and research conducted in the field of climate change and security, but many epistemic communities have yet to find a credible causal link between climate change and conflict. A robust body of literature on climate change and security nexus is still shaped by the “neo-Malthusian” view. We, therefore, find many countries not ready to buy the idea of climate security nexus or are rather slow in accepting it.

Most countries today are trying to recognize the climate-security nexus in their security policies but their progress is rather slow. The US did show its concern during the Clinton presidency. Vice President Al Gore used a documentary film, “An Inconvenient Truth,” to educate people about the issue of global warming. However, President Bush was least interested, and with the arrival of Obama, the scenario changed for more attention to climate change, once again dampened by the Trump administration’s walkout of the Paris Agreement in 2017. Although the US has been a laggard in climate change negotiations internationally within the US climate security debates have been a norm practiced by the members of Congress, think tanks, and the retired military leaders. That points to the fact that the political actors in the US comprehend “climate change as not only as an environmental concern but also as a threat to the US national security (Lucke, 2023).”

The EU, on the other hand, in the recent EU commission’s press release 2023, wholeheartedly accepts the idea of climate–security nexus. The joint communication by the EU Commission and the high representative highlighted “30 actions, including establishing a data and analysis hub on climate and environment security within the EU Satellite Centre; deploying environmental advisors in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations; setting up training platforms at national and EU level such as an EU Climate, Security and Defence Training Platform; developing thorough analysis and studies of related

policies and actions, especially in vulnerable geographical areas such as the Sahel or the Arctic (EU Commission, 2023).” The EU has linked the climate change and security nexus not only to the impacts on biodiversity and pollution but also takes into concern its impact on “peace, security, and defence” at local, regional and international level (EU Commission, 2023).

The Chinese experience with the environment is rather interesting. The country has oscillated between the Confucian philosophy of “Cosmic harmony” (National Geographic Society, 2024) and the “Man Must Conquer Nature” (National Geographic Society, 2024) approach of Mao. Mao’s “militaristic” approach to the environment favoured overpowering rather than preserving nature” (Vuori, 2023). “Nature was to be “conquered.” Wheat was to be sown by “shock attack.” “Shock troops” reclaimed the grasslands. “Victories” were won against flood and drought. Insects, rodents, and sparrows were “wiped out” (Shapiro, 2001). However, this militaristic domestic treatment of the environment did not stop China from taking an active part in international climate politics. At the international forums, China held the imperial and colonial policies of the highly industrialized countries of the global north as responsible for environmental degradation (Vuori, 2023).

China took the turn back to ecological civilization during Hu Jiang Tao in 2007 later continued by President XI Jing Ping. According to this “environmental concerns should be included in all aspects of the ideal of Chinese society, economy, and politics” (Vuori, 2023). As far as the climate security nexus is concerned China follows a two-pronged policy. At the multilateral level, China refrains from wholeheartedly embracing the idea of climate as a threat to international security to avoid jeopardizing its economic development and sovereignty. Whereas at the domestic level anthropogenic climate change is accepted as a threat to domestic security due to its devastating impacts on “environmental stability, human security and food/water security” (Nyman & Zeng, 2016) within China.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the causal relationship between internal migration and conflicts in Pakistan, in the regions of Baluchistan, Sindh, and KP. It is generally agreed that climate change has the capacity to bring about conflict in some locations and via a variety of different means. According to the study, the regions that are highly dependent on agriculture are more likely to experience conflict because of meteorological circumstances. Inadequate economic growth and political exclusion are two examples of the many socioeconomic and political concerns that are usually connected to this phenomenon. Even though Pakistan has not accepted climate change as a national security problem, there has been a very limited amount of research conducted on this subject. Additionally, Pakistan has refused to acknowledge the notion that climate change poses a threat. On the other hand, even though several elements of climate change have been evaluated, investigated, and argued on a global scale, there has been little research conducted to investigate the connection between climate change and Pakistan's national security. Therefore, the themes studied focus on the challenges that Pakistan is experiencing and the degree to which these problems have the potential to damage the national security of the country.

3. Research methodology

The study adopts an exploratory approach to investigate the complex relationship between climate change and armed conflict in Pakistan. This method through semi structured interviews and multidisciplinary assessment provides a comprehensive framework for investigating the relationship. The research used deductive analysis through the lens of environmental security and political ecology approach. It hypothesis anthropogenic climate change as a threat multiplier for armed conflicts in Pakistan. The data is collected from secondary and primary sources such as semi-structured interviews with environment experts, policy documents, official reports, and media sources to examine government responses to climate-related security challenges.

4. The climate-security nexus in Pakistan

The direct and indirect relationships between climate change and armed conflict in Pakistan serve to justify climate change as a driver of armed conflict in several keyways. Climate change directly affects vital resources such as water and agricultural land in Pakistan. Changes in precipitation patterns, melting glaciers, and increased frequency of extreme weather events directly impact water availability and agricultural productivity. As these resources become scarcer, competition and tensions over access to water and land escalate, leading to conflicts between communities, regions, and even countries. Climate change-induced disruptions to agriculture and livelihoods in Pakistan have indirect socio-economic effects that contribute to conflict. Reduced crop yields, loss of livelihoods, and increased poverty exacerbate socio-economic grievances and inequalities, leading to social unrest and tensions within communities. The resulting instability creates fertile ground for the emergence of armed conflicts fuelled by grievances over regional economic disparities and lack of access to basic resources by the people (Hafeez et al., 2024).

Although the climate change poses a threat to global security, little is known about the social and political stresses it may cause and how they interact with other factors to destabilize countries and regions. The case of climate change-induced social and political instability in Pakistan, however, is more complex phenomenon. In Pakistan, tensions and conflicts are exacerbated by resource scarcity, lack of social cohesiveness, corruption, and a rigid feudal political structure in the society (Jan et al., 2020).

There are various coping techniques available to groups and civilizations facing substantial reductions in quality of life because of climate change. They may first attempt to adapt to the new challenges. Adaptation is defined in this context as "adjustment in natural or human systems in response to present or anticipated climatic stressors or their effects". Armed conflict either harms or leverages advantageous chances. Societies that are unable to adapt to new circumstances face two options: resist or escape. The former technique entails using force to increase the allocation of limited assets. It also encompasses Homer-Dixon's so-called

mechanism of 'resource capture', wherein the affluents seize an authority over the more valuable resources at the cost of the poor, although it relates to resource competitiveness (Homer-Dixon, 2007).

The scholarly community seems to have consensus upon no direct association between climate change and the emergence of vicious disputes, especially wide-ranging inter- and intra-state conflicts. The IPCC has also officially endorsed the conclusion (Adger et al., 2017). However, Orders of incidents leading to eruptions of armed conflicts always tend to be multivariate and complicated, and simple triggering causes are rarely identified, especially in the case of Pakistan. Many studies indicate there might exist indirect links between climate change and the probability of conflict, even if straightforward associations can be discounted at the macro level. In other words, climate change may exacerbate conditions that contribute to increased conflict risk. There are numerous examples of how climate-related variables can cause or intensify local conflicts over natural resources, especially for economies that rely heavily on natural resources. It is consequently critical to comprehend in what ways and under what conditions these changes can lead to violent conflict. This type of context-specific approach may provide direction on what tangible measures contribute to lowering the probability of conflict in Pakistan. In contrast to the consensus and media coverage, very few scholars believe there is a clear link between the shortage of renewable resources and armed conflict. This is apparent in the absence of pure 'scarcity disputes' in the study material.

Rather, most studies of the environment and conflict outline a causal path in which scarcity of renewables adds another stone to the burden, meaning that violence is a likely outcome only in civilizations already plagued by a slew of other ills. According to Homer-Dixon 'environmental scarcity is not a standalone or sufficient reason for mass migrations, poverty, or violence; it always combines with other economic, political, and social factors to cause its effects. In this regard, a research investigation carried out by eleven retired US generals and admirals indicated that climate change has the potential to act as a 'threat multiplier' in vulnerable regions, dropping supplies of food and accessibility of freshwater.

4.1. Climate change and inter-state armed violence in Pakistan

The detrimental effect of global climate change on developing countries is considerably greater. The Global Climate Risk Index has ranked Pakistan as the fifth most susceptible state to climate change in its 2020 edition. Moreover, throughout a 20-year period, Pakistan has been subjected to over 150 massive disasters such as floods, cyclones, and droughts, among others (Eckstein et al., 2021). As a result of reaching the milestone, there is now an urgent need to shift focus to individually tackling the most critical effects of climate change, among which is inter-state violence, but a neglected one.

Multiple mechanisms explain the association between climate change and interstate conflict. In the current setting, relative deprivation induced by climate change in the form of food

security, health security, economic insecurity because of a scarcity of food, income loss, or the destruction of health infrastructure, among other things, has frequently been identified as a major contributing pathway.

The reason for this is that substantial individual deprivation can either cause violence else be exploited by terrorist and insurgent groups to increase their cadre numbers. By lowering the potential cost of violence, relative deprivation greatly increases the affected' proclivity to pursue a zero-sum path. In this context, it is worth noting that 15 of the 20 most food-insecure districts are in Baluchistan and former FATA (now including KP), are extremely prone to climate change due to high exposure and sensitivity, as well as low adaptive capacity, and are also strongholds for the Taliban and insurgents (IDMC, 2024).

Environmental migration, which encompasses scarcity issues and group identity conflicts, is an important factor in understanding the connection between climate change and inter-state armed violence. In the context of group identity disputes, environmental challenges and the associated threats to human needs might potentially trigger significant migrations and then strengthen ethnic identities due to the diversity within host communities. Regarding basic scarcity disputes, environmental migration may adversely affect the allocation of limited resources in host societies, leading to the emergence of scarcity conflicts. In support of the assertion, it is important to mention that the migration of flood-affected Sindhi and Pashtun communities to Karachi's Muhajir-dominated metropolitan sub-districts following the 2010 and 2011 floods triggered strong resentment from the Muhajir population, thus resulting in a significant intensification of the ethnic disturbances and criminal acts within the city worsening the law-and-order situation (Marcus, 2013).

In accordance with the World Bank Report, *Groundswell: Preparing for International Climate Migration*, the growing effects of climate change could drive over 140 million people to relocate within their own countries by 2050. Internal migrants in South Asia could be in the millions (IPCC, 2018). Furthermore, a 2016 assessment predicted that climate change-induced stressors would drive more than half of Pakistan's population to metropolitan areas during the next 10-15 years. Pakistan is already unprepared for the scenario, given that the major urban centres of Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad are expected to experience a water crisis in the near future and currently have low living standards. Apart from these main urban areas, no one city is prepared to deal with the migrant surge. Environmental migrations might thus contribute to the existing stressors and, as a result, have a negative impact on internal state stability by producing scarcity or group identity problems (Aslam et al., 2021).

Annual water availability in Pakistan has already gone below 1,000 cubic meters per person and is anticipated to fall further in the coming years (Parry et al., 2016). Similarly, a 70 million tons food deficit is projected by 2025, owing to 32% deficiencies in water supply, primarily due to climate change, and rising demand due to 2% annual population growth. This is projected to increase food insecurity, which is already at 36.9% due to food inflation and

scarcity. Furthermore, the agricultural sector absorbs 42% of Pakistan's labour force, making it one of the most climate-sensitive sectors, and a lot of households derive their main income from agricultural production (UNHCR, 2024).

Hence, variations in temperature and rainfall events, as well as a rise in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, are projected to cause a major loss in agricultural productivity. This means that climate change has the potential to exacerbate economic insecurity in the form of poverty, unemployment, and economic fragility. Human insecurities can create or maintain disparities, resulting in relative deprivation and internal instability. This implies that climate change holds the potential to resurrect inter-state conflict, which has been markedly reduced in recent years as a result of large-scale operations and severe controls. Despite a recent drop in violent occurrences, the Taliban and Daesh continue to pose a significant danger to Pakistan's internal security, according to a report by the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS, 2019). Similarly, ethnic cleavages have not been reconciled. As a result, it is imperative that we address the core causes of violence, one of which is climate change and the resulting individual fears.

4.2. Eco-terrorism and resource-driven conflicts: the climate change connection

The intricate interplay between environmental degradation, limited resources, and the alarming consequences of climate change is gradually influencing the evolving landscape of global security. Amidst this intricate network of challenges, a particularly worrisome occurrence has arisen: the merging of eco-terrorism and wars motivated by resources. In the face of the extensive consequences of climate change, extremist organizations use environmental weaknesses to further their ideological, political, and economic objectives. This link highlights the urgent need to acknowledge and address the intricate interrelationships among eco-terrorism, wars driven by resources, and climate change. This inquiry delves into the many aspects of the problem, examining the factors that cause it, the effects it has nationally, and the worldwide consequences, with a focus on how these dynamics manifest in the setting of Pakistan. In view of this delicate convergence, it has become critical to enact informed strategies and coordinated initiatives that transcend beyond traditional security paradigms, protecting simultaneously the natural environment and national security, economic stability in the context of climate-related concerns.

Climate change and its consequences will undoubtedly increase the opportunities for violent non-state actors (VNSAs) to exercise influence. This is principally because climatic repercussions may undermine a state's power and capabilities, increase competition for resources, demand policies that disproportionately damage particular people, and, therefore, limit the state's potential to respond. Nonstate actors may employ violence to influence or supersede the behaviour of the state. On numerous occasions throughout Pakistan's history, terrorist groups have been observed to gain sympathies and recruit prospective members in the aftermath of catastrophic events.

For instance, terrorist organizations like Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JuD) and Lashkar-i-Tayyeba (LeT) own significant charitable divisions, and they have been said to provide aid and conduct relief operations in the aftermath of the 2010 floods. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), both insurgent organizations, have taken advantage of the 2022 crisis to boost their recruiting efforts and garner sympathy from the destitute populace. Balochistan, a province severely affected by the floods in 2010 and 2022, has also seen a spike in Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) recruitment attempts in recent years, posing a threat to Pakistan and other South Asian countries (Memon, 2023).

Pakistan, situated at the intersection of South Asia, has a unique amalgamation of environmental challenges, further exacerbated by the phenomenon of climate change. The melting of Himalayan glaciers, including those in the Karakoram Range, has exacerbated water shortages, endangering the country's vital water supplies. In addition, fluctuating weather patterns, such as erratic monsoons and heat waves, worsen environmental susceptibility. As these problems arise, extremist groups in the area take advantage of the chance to manipulate the region's impaired natural systems, utilizing the resulting vulnerabilities to achieve their strategic objectives. Understanding how Pakistan's particular environmental context interacts with the formation of eco-terrorism provides critical insights into the intricate interplay between environmental elements and security dynamics (CNA Corporation, 2014).

The correlation between environmental hazards and eco-terrorism is evident in Pakistan's deliberate invasion of ecological spots and critical infrastructure. Extremist groups recognize the strategic value of disrupting ecological equilibrium, and they utilize their actions to inspire anxiety and further their doctrinal cause. Particularly, the country has witnessed attempts of eco-terrorism on water systems, underlining the link between climate-induced exposures and security dangers (Abrahms, 2007). This emphasizes the desire for a deeper comprehension of the way these groups operate in Pakistan's unique ecological setting as well as how their conduct may influence to conflict development.

The implications of risks of climate change that are exploited by eco-terrorism may extend over regional conflicts in Pakistan, which can negatively influence regional as well as global security. The climate-induced conflicts, fuelled by scarce resources and environmental deterioration, exacerbate international tensions and jeopardize the global order. Understanding the local dynamics behind climate-induced conflicts is critical in Pakistan for developing efficient initiatives that address each the country's immediate security challenges and the larger implications for regional as well as international stability. While the environmental and security settings develop, it is critical to conduct a comprehensive examination of the relationship between eco-terrorism, climate-induced conflicts, and Pakistan's particular vulnerability to inform legislative actions and collaborate internationally (Sovacool & Kenis, 2013).

The parties involved in an armed conflict may take advantage of various opportunities to escalate or de-escalate the conflict. Following the climate-related catastrophic disasters, there

were instances of increased local solidarity and mutual assistance in the communities, along with widespread grievances about the unpreparedness or slow response of the government. Nevertheless, these expressions of unity and complaints mostly gave rise to little social movements and had limited influence on larger military combat dynamics. Instead, the opposing factions reacted tactically to the opportunities created by the tragedy (such as increased recruitment or a distracted government) or the constraints imposed by it (such as decreased resources or restricted military mobility).

5. Conclusion

The climate security nexus in the context of Pakistan, according to this study, has been a probable cause of internal migrations that have played an important role in exacerbating the existing conflicts in the regions of KP and Baluchistan. This inquiry delves into the many aspects of the problem, examining the factors that cause it, the effects it has, and the worldwide consequences, with a focus on how these dynamics manifest in the setting of Pakistan. In answering the questions raised by the study, it has come up with the different ways in which the anthropogenic climate change has contributed to the resource scarcity and migration that has, in turn, played a significant role in the militant mobilization in the regions of KP and Baluchistan. Both these regions have become breeding grounds for terrorists. Where the displaced population after natural calamities hit by economic hardships, have become soft targets for recruitment by terrorist organizations like JuD and LeT. Another noticeable trend found in the areas afflicted by natural calamities is the significant contribution of aid and relief operations provided by the militant organizations to gain legitimacy amongst the afflicted populations. And finally, through ecoterrorism and wars motivated by resources the extremist groups in the area take advantage of the chance to manipulate the region's impaired natural systems, utilizing the resulting vulnerabilities to achieve their strategic objectives. In the face of the extensive consequences of climate change, extremist organizations use environmental weaknesses to further their ideological, political, and economic objectives. This link highlights the urgent need to acknowledge and address the intricate interrelationships among ecoterrorism, wars driven by resources, and climate change. In light of this intricate confluence, it is imperative to develop informed policies and synchronized actions that go beyond conventional security paradigms, safeguarding both the environment and national stability in an age characterized by climate-induced challenges.

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