

Research Article

A Decade of Terror in Nigeria: Challenges and Response from 2011 – 2021

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Abstract

Nigerians national security got flawed by a terror group on 26th August, 2011. A terror group which refers itself as “Jama ‘atuAhl as - sunnah li-Da’awatiWal- Jihad” JASDJ popularly known as Boko Haram detonated a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devise(VBIED) on United Nations Headquarters in Abuja killing scores and left many injured. A decade after, terrorists continue plotting and launching attacks in Nigeria. Barely, a decade into Nigeria return to a democratic government witnessed the sudden rise of insurgency threat to human lives, property and her nascent democracy. Considering the miracle of a transition to democracy after years of dictatorship military rule, many never imagined the sudden rise of terrorist cellular development that would bring feverish tension gripping innocent civilian populace of Nigeria. Compared to the ruthless and often uncommon shrewdness of the era of military rule that rose to dizzy heights in Nigeria, non had such sudden and prolonged reign of terror and insurgency threat to national security Foreign Embassies have issued travel advisory to its citizens, who intend visiting Nigeria, due to threat to life, terrorism and other related crimes. In so far as gap exist in the safety of lives, property and national security, this paper raises questions on what is terrorism? and what are the background and motives of terrorism in Nigeria? This paper examines the challenges and response top restoring order and averting the multiplication of terrorist groups in Nigeria. Terrorism releases shocking waves of fear in the spine of nations. When fear is gone life opens up all its grandeur. An increased majority are in fear from extremist and radical terror groups in Nigeria. Their right to life need be reassured and be delivered from this fear. Ultimately this paper deploys conceptual tools such as historical sources for objective analysis and answers to the concept of terrorism, its background and motives in Nigeria.

Keywords

Decade, Terror, Nigeria, Challenges, Response

1. Introduction

It is best to prevent terrorism than have it fester and then begin to pursue a counter terrorism strategy. The political theater of violence that is terrorism is not all new. [1] But historically, the decade before 2011 never posed security challenges in the guise of terrorism to Nigeria. Terrorism was not a regular term, neither was its menace a threat flavor to the

national security. Only few elite home’s in Nigeria who could afford cable satellite television had little knowledge from the comfort of their home what terrorist attacks and threat was. It never happened in Nigeria until 2011.

It is an important truism to note the direct negative impact, terrorism has on human rights, with ruinous damage to the right

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Received: 31 October 2025; **Accepted:** 17 November 2025; **Published:** 24 December 2025



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to life, liberty, self worth and integrity of victims. In addition to those, structural problems that cannot be evaded by national security such as suspension of the schooling process in time of terror attacks, destabilization of government and threat to social and economic development are obvious wedges to accessing and exercising human rights. Northeast Nigeria is the worse hit by terrorism in Nigeria. These region is not only blessed to have the five largest States (Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa and Kano) amongst the ten largest States in Nigeria but also borders three countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroun. It is a commercially prospective axis for transborder trade for Nigeria, however it has become a hot bed for terrorism since 2011. A larger percentage of its inhabitant lives in fear. The only way to restore their right to life and free from fear is to give them security and freedom. The world is engaged in a strategic struggle to give equal freedom, human right, silence the guns of terror and control religious radicalism.

This paper explores what has happened from 2011 up until 2021 in the response and challenges to terrorism and radical proscribed terror separatist groups in Nigeria.

2. Methodology of Study

This paper aims to historically reconstruct who, when and why terrorism has become a threat to Nigeria's national security. Data for this study is based on secondary data and materials written on terrorism. Using historical analysis techniques and descriptive approach to dissect activities of terrorism. Though terrorism seem to still persist ten years after its attack on United Nations headquarters in Nigeria; radicals who are spreading terror has not won against Nigeria's national security. Content analysis is used in providing information. Content analysis is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. [2]. A descriptive analysis is employed to examine the origin, changes and response to terror threats. The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of the sudden rise of terror on human lives under the return to a democratic government in Nigeria.

2.1. The Concept of Terrorism

What is Terrorism?

Terrorism is generally defined as an act of aggression and violence that targets civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological objectives. The concept of terrorism is very vague, because in legal terms, International Community has no comprehensive definition for act of terrorism. However, certain terrorist act has been classified as International Crimes. Basically, terrorist crimes against humanity. Heinous criminal acts by certain terrorist groups like Islamic state (ISIS) has crossed the requisite legal threshold as serious International Crimes. Boko Haram, a terrorist group in Nigeria which uti-

lizes sexual violence as means of terror, is currently being investigated by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity and war crimes. [3]

The International Community has reiterated in a number of instances its strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, whoever and for whatever purposes, as constituting one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. [4] It has also firmly rejected the identification of terrorism with any nationality religion or ethnicity. [5] The prevalence of new acts of terror and crime against human rights and humanity keep posing a challenge to the proper definition for terrorism. This had led to series of resolution at the United Nations General Assembly on what constitute an act of terrorism. Amongst such resolution which reviewed the concept for defining terrorism was 1994 UN General Assembly resolution 49/60 which states that terrorism includes "criminal acts intended to provoke a state of terror". The UN Security Council Resolution 1566 in 2004 expanded "criminal acts" against civilians intended to cause death or serious bodily injury and the 1999 International Convention for the suppression of the financing of terrorism and security council resolution 1566. [6] There is no explicit definition of the concept of "terrorism" in international humanitarian law. However, provisions has been made for a near accurate definition of terrorism, in order to effectively prevent, pursue, protects citizens fundamental human rights and eliminate all acts of terrorism through a transparent process that aligns with the role of law and International Human Rights Standards.

The application of the concept of terrorism is complex because of its domestic and international legal postures. For example, it regularly requires intelligence sharing, provision of mutual legal assistance and the freezing, confiscation of assets and extradition.

Terrorism appears in diver's forms. In order not to be overburdened by the definition of the concept of terrorism. There are common features associated with terrorism, they are:

- 1). A danger (to human life, grievous bodily injury or property)
- 2). Any attempt to intentionally undermine democratic government, in particular by trying to influence policy and lawmakers; and
- 3). Any indiscriminate approach to targeting with the purpose of inspiring fear and terror throughout a population

The International Community agrees unanimously that terrorism has no definite definition but certain acts constitute terrorist offences. [7] Those offences (e.g hijacking an aircraft) are now the subject of 18 international conventions and protocols adopted under the auspices of the United Nations or its agencies. [8]

2.2. Historical Backgrounds of Terrorism in Nigeria and Motives

2.2.1. Background of Terrorism in Nigeria

Boko Haram is the first group to be proscribed a terrorist group in Nigeria. Boko Haram was officially declared a terrorist group in June, 2013 by President Goodluck Jonathan under the Country's Terrorism Prevention Act.

Mohammed Yusuf was the founder of the Islamic group Jama'at Alil al-Sunnah li-l-Da'awahwa al-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram in 2002. It was a group of Sunni people, a sect which makes up 70% of the Muslim world population and a fusion of "Nigeria Taliban". The objective of the group was to overthrow the government and institutionalize a government which will be based on Sharia law. Boko Haram had a bitter distrust for Nigerians Western Education, Democracy and Constitution. The group had a clash with Nigerians government forces on July 2009 and suffered severe setbacks, hundreds of its members died including its founder and leader Mohammed Yussuf.

On July 2010, a year after, AbubakarShekau, Boko Haram's former second in command took leadership of the group. In solidarity with al-Qa'ida, he issued threat to the United States. Under the leadership of Shekau, Boko Haram has repositioned itself as a complete terror group. On 26th August, 2011 the first coordinated attack was launched against western interest; an improvised vehicle bomb attack was launched on UN Headquarters at Abuja, leaving 23 dead and more than 80 injured. Boko Haram claimed responsibility through its spokes person and promised future attack on US and Nigerian government interest.

Boko Haram onslaught persisted in 2014 against civilians, schools, politicians and Muslims who were sympathizers with the government and national security. By 2015 Boko Haram integrated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) pledging its allegiance and also reforming its designation Boko Haram into ISIL-West African Province with coordinated suicide bombings in Njamena, the capital of Chad in June 2014. Other Heinous crimes against humanity which provoked International Communities brought International condemnation was the kidnapping of the 276 school girls in April 2014 at Dapchi Borno, Nigeria. The United State Department designated Boko Haram a foreign terrorist organization in November 2013.

Finally, and above all, Boko Haram terrorist operations in the Northeast of Nigeria, has opened the way for other terrorist groups. Ansaru is an Islamist terrorist organization. It is broadly aligned with AL Qaeda based in Northern Nigeria and has been proscribed by the UK. It emerged in 2012 and also aligned with the position of Boko Haram in its Anti-Nigeria Government and Anti-Western agenda.

2.2.2. Religious Ideological Motives for Boko Haram Terrorist Group in Nigeria

Political and economic conditions had helped in creating

more radicals and terrorist groups around the world, all radicals and terrorist groups do have objectives which serve as motivating factors for been terrorist or radical groups. Amongst this several factors which serve as guide rules for terrorist and radicals are political, social, economic, psychological and religious motives.

Nigerians journey to terrorism was ignited solely by religious motives. Religion and ethnicity has been persistently used as fault lines to score political goals and advance regional interest.

The first terrorist group in Nigeria, Boko Haram was a vanguard of Sunnis led by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. He established the group under the name Jama'at Ahl al-sunnah li-l Da'awahwa al-Jihad in 2002. At the time of its establishment it was an Islamic Radical Fundamentalist Group who was dissatisfied being under the rulership of an "infidel". The group and its sympathizers wanted a country whose rulership would be based on sharia and an Islamic state. Their basic objective was to practice Islam the way Prophet Mohammed practiced Islam. The teaching of Islam is believed to encompass all aspects of life and its ultimate goal is the establishment of a global Islamic State. [9] Nigeria has a large Muslim population in West Africa which is concentrated mostly in the 19 Northern State of Nigeria. The population of Nigeria is almost evenly shared between the Muslim and Christian faith. But the political idea of Islam is conceptualized in the doctrine of Ummah, that is, a community of muslims. This is an idea that all muslims, regardless where they reside, are bound together through a common faith that transcends all geographical, political or national boundaries. [9] This solidarity is unified through muslims allegiance to Allah and the prophet Mohammed. [9] Because muslims believe that Allah revealed all laws concerning religion and secular matters through the prophet Mohammed, the entire Ummah (Muslim community) is governed by the divine law, or sharia. [9] But the reverse was actually the case in Democratic Nigeria. At 2002, when Boko Haram was created, President Olusegun Obasanjo was the Democratically elected president of Nigeria. The radical group and its sympathizers are not comfortable under the democratic rule of an "infidel" and president who was a Christian. The attitude of Boko Haram radicals is regularly guided by Surah 5:51 which translates "O you who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: they are but friends and protectors to each other" (Ali translation). [10] Boko Haram radicals believe Christians hate Muslims and wants to wipe Islam off the face of the earth. This had been the reasons why Boko Haram called for the ban on Western Education, Nigerians Constitution and Democracy, because they are legal instruments which protects the right to Worship, Association and Preserve the Sovereignty of Nigeria. But for Boko Haram they are instruments of an "infidel" governments that must be destroyed. It is radicalist believe amongst Boko Haram and its sympathizers, that sharia is applicable at all times and places and, therefore, transcends geographical boundaries and supersedes all other

laws.[9]Boko Haram radicals use these verses to sweepingly condemn Democratic leadership under a Christian President. On the inauguration of Goodluck Jonathan 10th February, 2019, Boko Haram radicals and sympathizers were not prepared for leadership under a government of another “infidel”, rather compromise the institutionalizing of an Islamic State. The radicalist Boko Haram integrated with Talibans and encouraged its sympathizers to take action and experience their faith rather than just talk about it. This led to escalating violence, attacks on civilians,governments facilities and security forces until it was officially declared a terrorist group under the Terrorism Prevention Act of Nigeria.

2.2.3. The Psychological Factors Responsible for Terrorism

All current terrorist groups in Nigeria, Boko Haram, Ansaru and the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), had formed the group along defined psychological state of mind. This state of mind has been personally conditioned along ethnic lines, hate and the desire for power. For example, Boko Haram was a vanguard of Sunnis before it became a terrorist group.This Sunnis does have the popular mindset and believe which recognize the Caliphate of the three Caliphs (AbūBakr, ‘Umar ibn al-khattāb and U-thmānibnAffān). They want the Caliphate system back. This mindset has blind folded them to the reality of modern state system. Which has legal sovereign structures that promotes and protect fundamental human rights.Boko Haram and Ansaru which has both been proscribed, terrorist groups share same mindset and ideologies. They are both aligned in their objectives against the Nigerian government and against western alliances, USA and Britain. They are very proud of the history of UthmanFodio Jihad of 1804 which Islamized a larger part of Nigeria. They want the Constitution suspended and the Country be united under a Caliphate system which will automatically make Nigeria an Islamic state. Traditionally, Islam divides the world into two spheres: the House of Islam (dar-al-Islam) and the House of war (dar-al-harb). [9] The House of Islam includes nations and territories that are under the control of muslims and where Sharia law is the highest authority. [9] The house of war includes nations and territories that are under the control of non Muslims and that do not submit to Sharia. Nigeria is a Democratic State that practice Federalism. It has not yet become a Caliphate governed by Sharia law because it has two major religion, Christianity and Islam. This had caused emotional pains for radical group like Boko Haram and Ansaru calling for an Islamic State. More so, indigenous people of Biafra currently proscribed as a terror group are of the mindset that they should do better off and has all it takes to be an independent nation. They are also, very proud of the Biafra civil war secession of 6th July, 1967 to 15th, January 1970. This mindset has often stirred hate; the desire for power and better govern Nigeria by all cause or granted independence. The cumulative of this psychological perspective had become badly managed and degenerated into radical

and terrorist groups.

2.2.4. Strategic Motives Behind Terrorism in Nigeria

Terrorism in Nigeria has been largely linked to bad governance. The inability of government in decades to equitably distribute state resources, deliver on its promises for better governance has been responsible for the surge of radical groups in Nigeria. It is important to make it clear here that there is tendencies when a larger percentage of a countries active population is pushed to the walls without support and hope from the government turn to the worse, by exploring terrorism as an exigency of logic rather than remain fearful of the future.

3. Result

Ever since the reign of terrorist threat with the bombing of the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja,Nigeria,several terror attacks have been recorded.Although Nigerian National Security established control over the country’s capital and never again was another repeated terror attack recorded in Abuja.However,terror groups have left dozens killed and their communities in ruins and destabilized by Boko Haram terrorist group mostly in the border communities of the North-East Nigeria with the Sahel region of Chad and Niger. [11] Additional gloom was cast over the tension of terror in Nigeria on the night of 14th to 15th April 2014 when 276 school girls aged 16 to 18 were abducted by the terrorist group Boko Haram in a community known as Chibok in Borno State,North East,Nigeria. [12] They were mostly Christians and the incidence was dubbed the Chibok School girls.Terror has remained a hydra headed monster that never dies even with huge Nigerian defence budget in the fight against insecurity and war against terrorism.Merely,four years after Chibok School girls abduction with the Nation still in pain,searching to rescue the girls if alive with their families in regret and anger over their daughters captivity by terrorist struck another terror attack with the abduction of 110 school girls at Government Technical School,Dapchi, Yobe State in North East, Nigeria. [13]

Regardless the huge investment on defence in Nigeria with various Joint Military Operations against terrorism and insecurity.Nigerian National Security was only able to be at its best but yet to put a time line to end the fight against a decade of terror and insecurity in Nigeria.Terrorist activities still looms large with the rise in banditry in North West Nigeria,an armed wing of the militant group of the Indigenous People of Biafra known as the Eastern Security Network of South East Nigeria with terror cellular cell development.Boko Haram still ranks the deadliest terrorist cellular development in the border North East communities of Nigeria with the Sahel Regionnotable for the most rapid growth of militant Islamist group activity in any region in Africa. [14]

4. Discussion

The fight against terror in Nigeria has proven to be challenging in producing positive result. It has not been very swift inputting to an end losses of innocent civilian lives to terror and most importantly contain the sabotage of military operations against the war on terror and insecurity. Despite huge troop military operations with their lives on the line in the battle against terror. The war against terror militant group and insecurity is yet to be won. Amongst the six geopolitical zones of South-East, South-South, South-West, North-Central, North-East and North-West of Nigeria three of the geopolitical zones out the six are grappling with major terror militants and insurgent groups. The South-East is being confronted with battles of insecurity of the “unknown gun men” and the militant faction of the ethnic nationalist group, the Eastern Security Network of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). It has claimed dozens of innocent civilian lives. In ten years between 2012 when Nnamdi Kanu created the separatist movement, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), gave birth to a militia arm of the group in 2021, known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) with more than 696 people killed by IPOB/ESN. [15] The North-Central, likewise has is major challenge of fighting spilling over through its rural boundaries with the far North of Nigeria as farmer-herder crisis, killing several innocent civilians and sacking farming communities widening the food insecurity margin. Between 2013 to 2014 fulani militants killed over 1,229 people with most attacks in the North-Central States of Benue, Kaduna, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau where there have been over 1,500 deaths. [16] The same outcry of the threat to lives is being experienced in the North-West of Nigeria with persistent killings and abduction by armed militant bandit groups across states of the region which were spillovers of the farmer-herder conflicts and the jihadist elements of the North-East. [17] The North-East of Nigeria has much weighty challenges of terror compared to other regions. Taking a long backward look from 2011 to 2022 it has been a decade of terror with casualties inflicted on civilians by terrorist, militants and bandits raising misgivings in domestic opinion on when and how would the art of national security of Nigeria be gotten right and put to rest the prolonged reign of terror over innocent civilians across four large geopolitical zones amongst Nigeria six geopolitical zones. Terror came as a disastrous insurrection and mishap few years into Nigeria’s return to democratic rule. This old problem remains a decade after even in fierce military counter-insurgency operation with the belligerents. It has remained a prolonged battle because it is not a conventional war that the national security armed forces are professionally trained for. The nature of insurgent groups aimed at bringing atrocities, intimidation and killings of civilians is different across the regions of their cellular development in Nigeria. It requires a great amount of time to study the nature of each terror group peculiar with the regions of Nigeria. As insurgents that they are they are defined as an organized move-

ments aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. [18] The belligerent groups know the government troops they at war with but the government counter-terror operation troops actually do not know them. This had put the belligerent group a step ahead and made it so difficult for the national security of Nigeria to give an exact time line to defeat terror, restore peace and order back to civilians and the universal human right to life and association across places hard struck and plagued by terror and armed militant group in Nigeria.

5. Challenges and Response

The challenges of terrorism is colossal. It destroys Human Rights, Rule of Law and Democracy. These are core values of United Nations charter and Constitution of Nigeria. The destructive impact of terrorism on Human Rights and Security has been recognized at the highest level of the United Nations, notably by the Security Council, the General Assembly, the former commission on Human rights and the new Human Rights council. [19] The other serious point is that terrorism threatens the dignity and security of human beings. It is a crime against humanity because it goes viz-a-viz organized crimes such as, drug trafficking, trafficking in arms, kidnapping, assault, hostage taking and banditry. Critical infrastructure which serves as life support for daily living are often first targets of terrorist. It is estimated that terrorist killed sixty one thousand two hundred and sixty one persons in Borno, Zamfara, Kaduna, Adamawa, Benue, Plateau and Yobe between 2011 and 2021 see Table 1. [20]

Table 1. Number of Terror-Related Deaths in Some States of Nigeria, 2011-2021.

Characteristics	Number of Deaths
Borno	35, 646
Zamfara	5, 747
Kaduna	5, 462
Adamawa	4, 097
Benue	3, 774
Plateau	3, 359
Yobe	3, 176

Source: Except from Doris Dokua Sasu. Statistics on Death from Boko-Haram Terror Activities in Nigeria, 2011-2021. Statista Report 2023.

Nigeria’s, national security in collaboration with the civil society and criminal justice system have made beneficial move, in many ways on counter terrorism. The Civilian Joint

Task Force, voluntary local intelligence gathering group was established in the terror stricken Northeast of Nigeria. They've been serving as a local intelligence gathering team for counter terrorism. They have provided essential unity to community security problem in Northeast Nigeria.

The Nigerian Air Force have upscaled her tactical excellence and strategy in counter terrorism in Nigeria. It opened a new Air Force in Bauchi, Katsina and Zamfara with a special force unit to respond to insecurity and terror threats.

The Navy, Army and Air Force have provided strategic counter terrorist bases in Bornu, Yobe and other axis of the Northeast notorious for terrorism. There is always room for strategic improvement, friction is an inevitable reality regardless how professional and modern military instrument might be but the operational outputs of Nigeria's Joint Military Operation against terrorism is overwhelmingly positive.

Terrorism in the Northeast of Nigeria had led to the exodus of experienced and skilled academics at the University of Maiduguri and other tertiary institutions. This had increased the illiteracy level in Northeast Nigeria. The Centre for Information Technology Development (CITAD) an International Non Governmental Organization has disclosed that the Northeast region has the least adult literacy rate with all states in the geographical zone scoring lower than the national average rate at 31.9% and 35.1% respectively. [21] The Nigeria Army has established a specialized Nigeria Army University, Biu, Borno State to respond to the educational needs of communities whose school was ravaged by terrorist.

Nigeria is in complete partnership as a member nation of United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, under pillar II on measures to combating and preventing terrorism. This partnership had responded well in improving security, protection of vulnerable targets and provision of humanitarian assistance.

6. Conclusion

It is important to note that terrorism may fester but it has no voice over the world unified against it. Nigeria has the best military in West Africa. But tactical excellence can never substitute for strategic incompetence, our political and military leaders have no grasp and understanding of the strategic challenges of the main and citizens at the base of the ladder. Our leadership must create the best strategy for equity in resource distribution across ethnic and religious divide. Courage and hope is all we have to lean on. Its time Nigeria do what Human rights law obliges states and avoid politicizing terror.

7. Recommendation

Nigeria national security must tighten her porous border to the bourgeoning phenomenon of rapidly growing extremist ideology from the Sahel region by restricting immigration

further on the influx of illegal immigrants from the Sahel countries.

Nigeria must clearly define proper use of her national power when it comes to issue of national security between politics and defence tactics by the professional armed forces group. The armed forces hardly will be able to do nothing without the support the parliament, political office holders and politicians. So often, politicians sabotage the efforts of the military on the war against terror. They get too emotional, never intentional about the war on terror because they need a path on the back and electorate support to win back their constituency political seat. If they rise against insurgency threat which are majorly internal or local phenomenon developed by people who are indigenes of this regions with external collaboration they become unpopular and would not reclaim their political office in the next electoral rerun. Simply put Nigeria must restore the prestige and power of her defense over politics.

Nigeria must resolve her many old problem of equal leadership representation at the Presidential and Governorship levels. Several ethnic groups are grossly marginalized and underrepresented in social and economic progress. They also are tax payers, they ought to be protected too under the social, economic and political net of the government. There must be a deliberate act to legislate the minority ethnic groups and regions out of this troubles. Then the people would trust the government, give her their support, back down from activities of militant ethnic nationalism and say something when they see something because the bandits, insurgents, militants and terrorist who reign terror are living amongst them.

Abbreviations

JASDJ	Jama 'atuAhl as-sunnah Li-Da'awatiWal-Jihad
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devise
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
UN	United Nations
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
IPOB	Indegenous People of Biafra
ESN	Eastern Security Network
CITAD	Centre for Information Technology and Development
OSCE	Organisaiton for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Author Contributions

AiyemowaBamidele is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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