

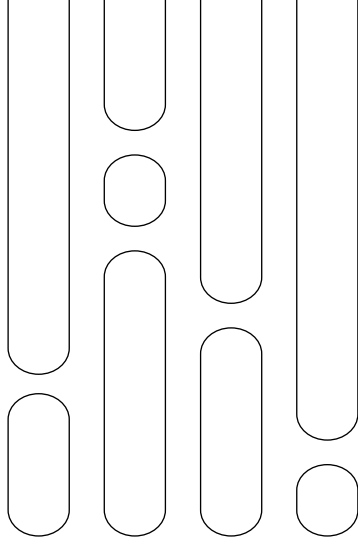
*Position Paper*

# IRAN'S ATTACK ON ISRAEL: ASSESSMENT, REPERCUSSIONS AND SCENARIOS

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Iran's direct military response to Israel's attack on its consulate in Damascus, resulting in the death of prominent Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders, represents a significant escalation with profound strategic implications. Despite lacking elements crucial for effective military operations, such as surprise, the attack signifies the first direct confrontation between Iran and Israel. This development not only heightens the risk of regional escalation toward a full-scale war, cautioned against by concerned nations in their reactions, but also carries far-reaching repercussions for Iran, Israel, and the United States. The attack's internal and external dimensions intertwine, contributing to considerable ambiguity regarding future scenarios. This ambiguity extends to ongoing conflicts such as the war in Gaza and the Iranian-Israeli confrontations, raising questions about potential developments and outcomes.

### **Assessing the Iranian Strikes Against Israel**

The Iranian attack on Israel has sparked a divide among specialists and strategic experts within think tanks and specialized centers for strategic studies. This divide stems from the unique nature of the attack and the premeditated messages that accompanied it, which detracted from its effectiveness and imbued it with more symbolism than tactical significance. The attack, executed using a combination of 185 drones including the Shahid 136, Shahid 149, Mohajer-6 Quds, as well as 110 surface-to-surface missiles and 36 cruise missiles, can be analyzed through two main themes:

#### **Limited and Symbolic Iranian Attack Against Israel**

The Iranian response attack did not achieve the same momentum and impact as the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate building in Damascus for several reasons:

- **Lacking elements of surprise and secrecy:** The Iranian strikes, spanning approximately five continuous hours, lacked crucial elements necessary for achieving military objectives, notably the element of surprise and secrecy. These elements, which characterized the attacks of Palestinian resistance factions against settlers in the Gaza envelope, are essential for paralyzing the opponent's ability to develop a specific scenario for preparedness and confrontation, thereby reducing potential damage. Unlike these attacks, the Iranian strikes appeared to be anticipated by its opponents, namely the United States and Israel. Significant-

ly, US President Joe Biden had confirmed, mere hours before the attacks, that Iran's response would occur [sooner rather than later](#). Additionally, according to reports from CNN, the United States had been monitoring Iran's preparations for a retaliatory strike against Israel, including the potential deployment of up to [100 cruise missiles](#). These reports suggested that Iran might have been preparing to launch attacks from within its territory, targeting deep inside Israel. US military officials anticipated the possibility of Iran employing more than [100 drones](#) and numerous missiles against military targets within Israel.

Israel's awareness of the timing, weaponry and target areas of the Iranian attack further underscores the lack of surprise and secrecy surrounding the Iranian strikes. The Israeli military Spokesperson Daniel Hagari revealed that Israel was closely monitoring the launch of Iranian missiles and drones. He noted that the missiles and drones [would take hours](#) to reach their intended targets, allowing Israel to coordinate with the United States and regional partners in the Middle East while awaiting their arrival. This coordination aimed to ensure that Israeli and US air defenses were ready to intercept and shoot down the incoming Iranian missiles before they reached their designated targets.

The depth of knowledge possessed by the Americans and Israelis regarding the Iranian attack extends beyond just the timing and weaponry involved. Sources revealed to CBS that the perpetrators of the attack were [Iranian forces and armed militias](#) scattered throughout the Middle East. These groups had reportedly been supplied with additional Iranian weapons in the weeks leading up to the strikes. While various militias across the region were involved, the majority of the weapons were launched from Iran itself. This comprehensive understanding suggests that both the United States and Israel were well aware of the coordinated nature of the attack and the involvement of Iran-backed forces across multiple countries. The strikes were not limited to Iran's direct actions but also involved proxy groups aligned with Iranian interests, operating in regions such as southern Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and pro-Iran militias in Iraq and Syria.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement, made on April 13, 2024, just one day before the attack, indicates a significant level of preparedness within Israel for potential Iranian actions. Netanyahu emphasized that defensive and offensive systems were deployed and ready to respond to any Iranian attacks, suggesting thorough coordination

and readiness on the part of Israel's defense establishment. This level of preparation is noteworthy and suggests a departure from past conflicts, where such overt statements of readiness were less common. Furthermore, the decision of numerous Arab and non-Arab capitals to close their airspaces ahead of the attack reflects a broader regional concern and anticipation of potential hostilities.

Iran's proactive approach to notifying its adversaries before the attack is evident in statements made by [Javad Karimi Ghodousi](#), a member of the National Security Committee in the Iranian Parliament. Just hours before the attack took place, Ghodousi disclosed Iran's imminent targeting of Israel through a tweet. In his tweet, Ghodousi warned that the "Zionist regime" would be punished by Iranian missiles such as the Sejil, Khaybar and Shahab if it assassinated figures of the resistance front anywhere in the world. This public announcement serves as further evidence of Iran's deliberate efforts to inform both the Americans and Israelis of the impending attack.

■ **Repeating the scenario of informing foes of the attack in advance:** Iran's approach, lacking the element of surprise, suggests a strategic aim to execute a limited strike. This approach serves to fulfill Iran's threat and defiance before its domestic audience while avoiding direct confrontation with Washington and Tel Aviv. This mirrors Iran's retaliation for the killing of Qassem Soleimani, where former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif revealed in his book *The Depth of Patience* that Iran had notified the Trump administration in advance of its intention to launch limited strikes on the Ain al-Asad air base.

The prior notification to the Americans in both instances underscores Iran's desire to prevent significant human casualties and potentially catastrophic repercussions. By opting for symbolic and limited strikes, Iran sends a message of capability without escalating the conflict beyond manageable proportions. This approach allows Iran to tell those at home that it is capable of making and fulfilling vows and threats —nothing more.

Thus, it can be argued that Iran's attack was scheduled in terms of timing and results as many Israeli and Western media outlets reported that Washington and Tehran negotiated a few days before the attack the potential scale and impact of Iran's response, ensuring that it would not cause serious damage in Israel that would prompt Israel to retaliate which could expand the Iran-Israel conflict across the Middle East.

Israeli officials reportedly [said](#) that Israel would tolerate an attack that only resulted in physical damage to military facilities.

■ **Failure to achieve military objectives:** As the attacks lacked the element of surprise, Iran's plan became evident in terms of its timing, choice of weaponry, and military objectives. Conversely, Israel and the United States were prepared to intercept Iranian drones and missiles, thwarting Iran's desired goals. Consequently, from a military perspective, the Iranian attacks did not yield significant results. [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) declared the interception of Iranian missiles, underscoring the effectiveness of the defensive measures. According to [the Israeli military Spokesperson Daniel Hagari](#), Iran launched over 300 missiles and drones towards Israel, with 99% of them successfully intercepted. Only a limited number of dozens of Iranian surface-to-surface missiles managed to breach Israeli airspace, landing in certain Israeli cities. Among these, [seven ballistic missiles out of 110](#) launched caused minor damage to an Israeli military airport in southern Israel and injured a girl. The majority of Iranian cruise missiles were intercepted [outside Israeli airspace](#), with some falling over Syria and Jordan, aided by US and British participation.

While Iranian war exercises primarily showcased their new weapons systems and capabilities, they lacked the strategic and tactical depth required for engagement with a nation possessing advanced weaponry like Israel. Reports have emerged of drones and missiles experiencing technical or mechanical failures, resulting in their failure mid-flight. Additionally, some were intercepted by Israel and its allies, who implemented jamming measures on the global positioning system (GPS), thwarting the effectiveness of these Iranian assets.

■ **Failure to achieve a balance of terror, deterrence and inflict damage:** The absence of surprise in the Iranian attack and its limited military impact have led to a failure to achieve a balance of terror, deterrence, and inflict damage on Israel. Given that Israel was aware of the timing, weaponry and objectives of the attacks beforehand, no significant damage or substantial costs were incurred by Israel. Despite Iran's retaliatory actions in response to attacks on the IRGC leadership, both within and outside Iranian territory, the Iranian attack failed to achieve its intended goals of terror and deterrence. Consequently, these strikes are unlikely to compel Israel to reconsider its calculations regarding future attacks on Iranian targets.

■ **Blowing up Iran's forward defense doctrine:** The longstanding forward defense doctrine that Iran has embraced in the Middle East may now be at risk of fading away. This doctrine, which allowed Iran to indirectly engage with its adversaries through proxy forces in the region, effectively concealing its direct involvement, could become untenable in light of recent developments. Over the past decade, Iran's reliance on proxies for both defensive and offensive actions has been a cornerstone of its regional strategy. However, as regional dynamics evolve, particularly with the changing geopolitical landscape, Iran's military may need to reevaluate its approach. This could entail transitioning away from the hybrid warfare model that relies heavily on proxy engagement and instead, formulate new doctrines that involve more direct forms of military engagement.

■ **Impacting the Israeli defense doctrine:** The recent attacks are likely to compel Israel to prioritize the acquisition of cost-effective anti-drone defenses. Israeli military estimates suggest that approximately \$1 billion worth of air defense missiles were utilized to intercept Iranian drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles during the attacks. While Israel already possesses robust defenses against such threats, it will seek to enhance its air defense systems based on the insights gained from these attacks. Looking ahead, Israel is expected to escalate its covert preemptive strikes within Iran, in addition to bolstering espionage efforts and engaging in electronic warfare to disrupt Iranian drone devices.

### **The Impact of the Iranian Attack on Israel**

The Iranian attack against Israel holds implications that extend beyond its immediate physical impact. Some of the most significant implications include:

■ **Further threatening Israeli security:** The Israeli and Iranian narratives diverge on the impact of the recent attack, with Israel claiming minimal damage while Iran has claimed success in hitting key military targets, including the Negev air base. Israeli officials stress that their air defenses intercepted most missiles and drones, resulting in minimal harm. Conversely, Iran asserts significant hits, signaling its capacity to strike strategic Israeli locations. These differing accounts reflect strategic messaging by both sides to shape perceptions. Yet, the Iranian assault might have breached a significant threshold by originating from state actors within their own territories toward Israeli soil. This signals

a shift in Middle Eastern dynamics, challenging traditional norms that previously restrained state actors from launching such strikes against Israel.

■ **Deepening the psychological impact on Israelis:** Israeli decision-makers and citizens find themselves grappling with an unprecedented psychological toll akin to the aftermath of the events of October 7, 2023. This historic scene inflicted significant human and material losses on Israel, leading to a profound shift in the Israeli security paradigm. Previously perceived as an impregnable force ensuring safety for its citizens, Israel now faces a strategic impasse both domestically and internationally. Operation Al Aqsa Storm rattled Israeli decision-makers, prompting the launch of a relentless war against the Gaza Strip. The enduring toll of casualties, the wails of sirens, and the sight of people seeking refuge or fleeing to other countries against the backdrop of relentless rocket attacks have further compounded this psychological strain.

■ **Dispersing Israeli forces across multiple war fronts:** Although the Iranian attack yielded limited outcomes, some experts suggest that it could scatter Israeli power across multiple fronts, a scenario that Israel dreads and one that might alleviate the pressure of the war on Gaza. Reports in the media indicated that mere Iranian threats to retaliate against the Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria prompted Tel Aviv to withdraw its military forces from the [southern Gaza Strip](#) on April 7, 2024. This move was seen as a precaution against potential Iranian attacks from the northern fronts in Syria and Lebanon, regions where Iran maintains a robust military presence.

■ **Deflecting attention from the international outrage against Israel over the Gaza war:** Israelis may leverage the Iranian attack to advocate for international condemnation of Iran and divert attention from Israeli actions against Palestinians. Prime Minister Netanyahu may also seek to bolster his domestic standing, addressing discontent and legal cases against him within Israel.

### **The Attack's Implications for the Home Fronts in Iran, Israel and the United States**

The Iranian attack on Israel resulted in relatively limited material losses and no human casualties. Nonetheless, its implications, both positive and negative, will be significant for Israel, Iran and the United States, the three directly involved parties.



## Iran

In recent years, Iran has faced significant strikes targeting its military leaders by the United States and Israel. This began with the targeting of Qassem Soleimani in 2020 and continued with the targeting of several other leaders both inside and outside Iran, culminating in the attack on Mohammad Reza Zahedi and his companions inside the Iranian consulate in Damascus. These operations have not only embarrassed the Iranian government before domestic and regional audiences but also established a new rule of engagement, where Iran responds with condemnation and threats rather than direct retaliation to such strikes. Given this context, the most important repercussions of the attack on Iran are as follows:

- The Iranian establishment restoring its prestige before the public: The attack allows the Iranian establishment to reclaim its prestige in the eyes of the Iranian people by demonstrating its capability to strike Israel directly when Iranian red lines are crossed. This action strengthens the ruling establishment's legitimacy, which has long been rooted in its narrative of confrontation with the United States and Israel since its establishment in 1979. The Iranian religious leadership believes that failing to respond would have risked this narrative and undermined its credibility among Iranians, particularly the Shiite community. However, Tehran was careful to ensure that its response was calculated, aiming to avoid escalation beyond its control or triggering direct US intervention that could threaten the political system's stability. By executing a measured response, Iran sought to reaffirm the efficiency and effectiveness of its ruling establishment, bolstering its legitimacy, which has faced significant challenges in recent years due to internal crises.

- Iran is leveraging its measured response to strengthen its position in the Shiite community and to enhance its image in the Arab and Islamic world as a staunch opponent of Israel and the United States in both rhetoric and action. Iran can also exploit this attack in soft power and regional projects and improve its standing before non-state actors and groups with disregard to nation-states. Alongside asserting its "credibility" via its responses, Iran aims to portray its opponents as inconsistent and to restore its sectarian reputation as the largest Shiite country, which had been tarnished by its involvement in sectarian conflicts in the region. To achieve these goals, Iranian rhetoric emphasizes the strength and capability of its supreme leader, highlighting his opposition to Israel

and accusing Iran's adversaries of weakness, subservience and collusion with the Zionist-American agenda. This discourse has been consistently propagated through Friday sermons in Iranian regions, Shiite-majority countries, Iranian media and affiliated Arab channels since the establishment of the Iranian republic in 1979.

■ The attack, originating from Iran, was executed by the IRGC rather than the army, likely due to the fact that the victims of the Israeli attacks were members of the IRGC, which the Constitution empowers to respond to in such situations. However, irrespective of these specifics, this event underscores the growing influence of the IRGC within the Iranian establishment. As the institution at the forefront of confrontation with perceived adversaries, it holds significant sway over formulating state policies and strategies, effectively leading the country. This influence was particularly evident following the Iran-Iraq War, during which the IRGC's sacrifices bolstered its position, leading to its enhanced role even beyond military matters. Given the ongoing competition over the future direction of the Iranian establishment, such confrontations are likely to be key tools employed by the IRGC in the power struggles anticipated in the post-Ali Khamenei era.

■ The attack marks a departure from the traditional rules of engagement between competing parties, establishing a new norm. Just as Israel deviated from the norms by targeting diplomatic headquarters, Iran also crossed red lines by directly targeting Israel from within its own territory rather than through proxy forces in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. This development suggests that both the United States and Israel will need to factor in potential Iranian responses in future confrontations, anticipating retaliation for strikes directed at Iran. While the attack may have failed militarily, its political significance represents a shift to a higher level in the rules of engagement, as previously noted. Consequently, the possibility of further escalation to even higher levels cannot be discounted, particularly within worst-case scenarios.

■ The disciplined Iranian response, swiftly confirmed by the Iranian mission to the United Nations, indicated that the attack had ceased even before the missiles reached their targets. Iran also adhered to the "rules of engagement" followed by its agents in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen after previous attacks. Additionally, there was indirect "coordination" with the United States to prevent human casualties in Israel. This demonstrated the "rationality" of Iranian decision-makers, a pattern of

behavior consistent with past instances. Former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani affirmed that Iran had informed the Americans through the Iraqi prime minister prior to the attack on US bases in response to the killing of Soleimani. Such actions reinforce the perception within the US administration, supported by the Iranian lobby, that Iran acts pragmatically in its own interests, potentially opening avenues for understanding and settlements. Consequently, the option of “overthrowing the current regime,” advocated by Republican hardliners, may be deemed untenable.

### **The United States**

These volatile developments in the Middle East coincide with the US elections, characterized by a fierce rivalry between incumbent President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump. Consequently, the calculations are finely tuned, with President Biden aiming to contain the situation in the Middle East and prevent its escalation into a regional conflict. Given the potential repercussions on the US domestic front, owing to past experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as economic implications, the United States finds itself deeply embroiled in the situation. The current scenario plays into the hands of President Biden's Republican rival, who seeks to capitalize on his Democratic counterpart's perceived failure to manage the ongoing crisis. Despite the risks of regional escalation, the Iranian attack on Israel presents opportunities for President Biden on two fronts: Firstly, by actively participating in countering the attack and reaffirming unwavering support for Israel, Biden secures the backing of Jewish voters and supporters of Israel at large. Even though his Republican opponent, Donald Trump, seized the opportunity to criticize Biden, alleging his supposed weakness allowed the attack to occur, Biden's stance bolsters his image as a defender of Israel. Secondly, Biden leverages the Iranian attack to exert pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his administration. In response to Netanyahu's push for an expanded military response, including strikes on Rafah to negotiate a ceasefire, media reports suggest that President Biden made it clear that the United States would not support any Israeli escalation in response to the Iranian attack. This stance mirrors previous instances where Biden pressured Israel, such as following the killing of individuals associated with the World Central Kitchen (WCK) by the Israeli army. Israel's subsequent allowance of aid into the northern

Gaza Strip underscores the challenges Netanyahu faces in broadening the war's scope in the face of US opposition.

## Israel

Israel, particularly Prime Minister Netanyahu, finds itself deeply affected by the Iranian attack. Despite Netanyahu's outwardly confident stance, promising victory and vowing to confront the attack head-on, he faces a significant dilemma. Both internal and external pressures on him are set to intensify, with little prospect of achieving substantial military success in Gaza, as originally envisioned at the outset of the conflict. Internally, Israeli society is experiencing heightened insecurity, amplified by the broad geographical scope of the attack. Unlike previous Palestinian resistance attacks confined to specific areas, the Iranian strike triggered nationwide alarm, leading to school closures and airspace shutdowns. These developments compound a series of recent failures experienced by Netanyahu's administration. Moreover, the Iranian attack bolsters the Israeli opposition's position, which advocates for an end to the Gaza conflict and accuses Netanyahu of prioritizing personal interests over national security. Both domestically and internationally, there is mounting pressure on Netanyahu to seek a resolution to the conflict rather than escalate it further. While international condemnation of the Iranian attack demonstrates solidarity with Israel, it does not necessarily translate into support for retaliatory action against Iran. Many countries fear the potential consequences of regional escalation. Regardless of Netanyahu's course of action, it is evident that any decision will deepen existing divisions within Israel, exacerbating tensions both within the government coalition and with the opposition. Netanyahu may seek to leverage the attacks to rally Israeli public opinion in favor of retaliation, providing a temporary reprieve from mounting pressures. The Israeli military's [announcement](#) of defensive and offensive plans following the Iranian attack, along with the promise of a response, aims to restore a semblance of stability within Israel amidst internal turmoil.

## Potential Scenarios in the Wake of the Iranian Attack

The unprecedented Iranian attack on targets within Israel has undoubtedly established new parameters for engagement between the two adversaries, potentially reshaping future confrontations. The repercussions of this attack may unfold into various scenarios, influenced by several key factors: Firstly, Israel's response to the Iranian attack will

significantly shape the trajectory of the conflict, including the scope and limitations of its retaliatory measures. Secondly, Iran's willingness to either replicate or expand such attacks in response to Israeli retaliation will play a pivotal role in escalating or defusing tensions. Thirdly, the stance adopted by the United States regarding the escalation and its efforts to mitigate the confrontation will have significant implications for the course of events. Lastly, the parties involved will conduct assessments of the attack, weighing the perceived gains and losses, which will influence their subsequent actions. Against this backdrop, several pivotal scenarios may unfold:

### **Quelling Tensions and De-Escalation**

This scenario suggests that Iran and Israel will seek to de-escalate and limit their reciprocal attacks. Israel will refrain from targeting Iran directly or indirectly, and Iran will reduce its attacks against Israel or its interests. This outcome could reinforce the new equilibrium established by the Iranian attack on Israel, fostering mutual deterrence and prompting Israel to reconsider its policies, including its covert actions. Israel may recognize that while the United States is committed to its security, it is unwilling to engage in direct military action against Iran or alter regional engagement dynamics. Iran, on the other hand, may seek to de-escalate tensions with Israel to maintain domestic legitimacy and address waning confidence in its anti-Israel rhetoric. Iranian officials have indicated a reluctance for further escalation following the achievement of their primary goal of regime preservation. Additionally, Israel's focus on the Gaza Strip conflict and Prime Minister Netanyahu's desire to leverage US support to bolster his domestic position may further incentivize de-escalation. Moreover, regional and international circumstances may discourage Israel from further exacerbating tensions, considering the potential expansion of conflict fronts and the strain it would place on its defense systems in facing a multi-front war.

### **Changing the Rules of Engagement — Leading to a Broader Confrontation**

This scenario entails a fundamental shift in the dynamics between Iran and Israel, marking the end of the shadow war and indirect confrontations, and ushering in a new phase of heightened escalation that could potentially culminate in full-scale war. There are two potential outcomes within this scenario: Firstly, there could be direct, intermittent exchange-

es of attacks that directly impact the national security, sovereignty and interests of both countries. Secondly, tensions could escalate further, leading to a large-scale war that transcends localized battlefields. The escalation is driven by the crossing of a threshold in the conflict, with Iran demonstrating a willingness to respond directly within Israeli territory for the first time. This bold move may erode confidence in the Israeli military and leadership, prompting Israel to retaliate in an attempt to restore deterrence power. Prime Minister Netanyahu, facing internal crises and challenges in Gaza, may feel compelled to escalate the situation to deflect attention and bolster his position. Additionally, Iran's readiness to respond to any Israeli attack, including threats to target US bases, could expand the scope of the regional confrontation. This may lead to a reassessment of the US position, particularly considering the potential damage to Washington's reputation in the region.

### **Resuming the Shadow War**

This scenario suggests that both Iran and Israel will recognize the dangers of further escalation and refrain from direct targeting and violations of regional sovereignty in the future. Instead, they will revert to a strategy of engaging in a shadow war and indirect confrontation, allowing them to avoid direct responsibility for harming each other's interests. Under this scenario, Israel will resume targeting Iranian militia leaders in regional countries and carrying out attacks on militias and groups affiliated with Iran. These actions may also include covert attacks on sensitive facilities and targets within Iran, without publicly acknowledging responsibility. In response, Iran will retaliate through its proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or the Houthis in Yemen, as well as through cyberattacks against Israeli targets or detaining Israeli ships, all while maintaining plausible deniability. This approach aligns with Israel's reluctance to escalate the conflict further by launching strikes against targets inside Iran, especially given the success of its recent efforts to counter the Iranian attack with the assistance of its allies, particularly the United States. The impending US elections also contribute to the pressure on Israel to avoid escalation, as the focus shifts to political and diplomatic responses rather than military action. Given the deep-seated hostility between the two sides, a return to a shadow war and indirect confrontation appears to be the most realistic scenario. A full truce is deemed unrealistic due to these underlying hostilities. In the future, Israel's response may lean toward more targeted and quali-

tative actions aimed at boosting Prime Minister Netanyahu's domestic standing, while avoiding actions that could escalate into a full-scale war, given the regional and international desire to prevent further instability in the region.



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