INTERVIEW II

DATE: May 29, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES S. MURPHY

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

PLACE: Mr. Murphy's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

B: Sir, last time you were talking about briefing former President Truman on the behalf of President Johnson, and after the tape was off, you mentioned that Mr. Johnson had extended other courtesies to Mr. Truman and his family.

M: Well, that is true, and I have not had an opportunity to review whatever records might be available to refresh my memory. I do remember a number of things though. President Johnson went to Independence, Missouri, on at least one and I think two occasions for something in the nature of a ceremony. I went with him once where they were signing a bill, I think maybe the Medicare bill, in the Truman Library in Independence. President Truman was there and took part in the ceremonies, at least, was present on the stage. I think there was another such occasion as that when I did not go with President Johnson, but he went out there. He did go out there on a personal birthday visit to President Truman in early May of 1968, just a few days before President Truman's birthday, which is on May 8. I did go with him on this trip. Mrs. Johnson and the President went, and Senator [John] Pastore and I. That was a delightful and very thoughtful visit. The Johnsons

took a number of birthday gifts for President Truman. He appreciated that very much. President Johnson also called President Truman on the telephone from time to time to tell him some of the things that he was planning to do and to ask for President Truman's comments and reaction. I do not have any detailed or intimate knowledge of this. I do know that he did it from time to time, and I expect he did it a good deal more than I am aware of.

B: Didn't you mention that Mr. Johnson provided transportation to Key West and medical facilities?

M: That is true. President Truman's health had been quite bad for about three years, I guess. Three years [ago] now, I think in April of 1966 it must have been, he had an attack of some kind and was laid up in the hospital for some time. And after that [Truman] stayed at home and got about very poorly, did not take any walks. He did not go to his office in the Library until the early spring of last year. He and Mrs. Truman decided to go to Key West, Florida for a vacation for the month of March, I guess it was. Margaret and her family were to meet them down there and did meet them down there. The Trumans actually had made reservations to go by commercial airline service. President Truman's health was not good enough to make that at all a suitable way to travel. President Johnson learned about this and he insisted that they should go in one of the presidential planes, and the Trumans agreed to do this.

President Johnson sent a plane out there to take them to Key West. Also, there was a Secret Service detail at Key West. Now this

is provided for former presidents, I guess, certainly now as a matter of statute law, and I think it was at that time. But in addition to that, President Johnson sent one of the White House physicians down there to look after President Truman. Doctor Voss, V-O-S-S, who was a very fine and pleasant man, and, I believe, a good doctor. He became quite fond of the Trumans and they became quite fond of him. He got President Truman started taking, I think, vitamin B-12, although I am very much a layman in such matters as this. There was a notable improvement in President Truman's health. While he was in Key West in March of last year, he began taking walks fairly regularly of some little distance. He went home with his health much improved and since then he has regularly taken walks. His health, of course, is not as vigorous as it was before his attack in 1966, but it is much better than it was between the period of that attack and March of last year.

Then the Trumans went back to Key West for about two weeks the latter part of this March, by the way, and this same Doctor Voss went back. He is no longer on duty as White House physician. He is a naval physician I believe [and] was sent down there for this purpose. I don't believe I have any actual knowledge of how the Trumans got to Key West this time, but I expect that the present president made a plane available to them.

President Johnson was very thoughtful about this kind of thing, not only so far as the Trumans were concerned, but also so far as

President Eisenhower was concerned. He did make facilities of this kind available to President Eisenhower to the extent that he needed them and would use them. Now this was not quite the same as the situation with respect to President Truman, because President Eisenhower, being also a five-star general, had a number of things of this kind available to him in that capacity as well.

B: To move into other areas, did Mr. Johnson ever talk to you about the Vietnamese war?

M: Not a great deal. I am sure that he must have mentioned it. You couldn't escape mentioning it some. He did not talk to me in any serious way seeking my advice on policy questions in connection with the Vietnamese war.

B: I asked because Clark Clifford, who served with Mr. Truman with you, apparently was instrumental in the bombing halt there toward the last.

M: That is true. But Clark Clifford was at that time the secretary of defense. He and the Secretary of State and Walt Rostow, who was special assistant to the President for defense and international matters, met regularly at luncheon once a week, where they had lengthy discussions of this kind of problem. George Christian and Tom Johnson, I guess, attended those luncheons regularly. I don't think any other White House staff people attended them regularly. I never attended them at all. I think that possibly Harry McPherson might have gone on occasion. The only time that I remember

talking with President Johnson or his talking with me in a meaningful way about the Vietnamese war was in connection with the Democratic platform in 1968.

B: I was going to ask you about that later. Did you discuss coming politics with Mr. Johnson prior to his withdrawal from the race?

M: Very little.

B: Did you just sort of assume that he was going to run for re-election?

M: Well, I moved from the Civil Aeronautics Board to the White House in March, 1968. The decision to do this was made I expect in December, 1967. At that time I went to the White House at President Johnson's request. I had asked him to accept my resignation so that I could retire from government service. He agreed to accept my resignation as chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board, but he also asked me to come to the White House to work for him. And in the course of that conversation, he said in an incidental fashion that he did not know whether he was going to run again or not.

B: When was this conversation?

M: I expect it was in December, 1967. So I went to the White House in March of 1968 with his having said something of that kind to me in an incidental fashion more than once, at least twice and perhaps three times, that led me to believe that he might be considering not running. After I went to work there in March, the things that he said gave me more and more the feeling that he would run for re-election. So I left on a vacation along toward the end of March in 1968 and was gone for a week as I recall and got back

home on the day that he made the speech, a Sunday night. I had not see him for a week before that speech, hadn't heard him say or talk about anything. But since I had all during the period that I had been there come to have more and more the feeling that he was likely to run, I was quite surprised when he announced that he would not run. He did not discuss that decision with me.

B: When you went to the White House in March before his announcement, what were you told your duties would be?

M: Well, this was not at all specific. I was told, I guess, that my duties would be whatever the President wanted me to do. He was very kind and I would say quite flattering in what he said about my coming over. He said he just wanted me there to advise him about anything that might come up.

B: After his withdrawal, did he ever discuss it with you? Explain his motives and that kind of thing?

M: Not really. Not at any length. It was the kind of thing that he mentioned incidentally and I heard him mention a good many times in talking with other people. And I'll get back to that.

But before I went over there to work, he did not ask me to come to work in a campaign. In fact he had said, as I indicated earlier, that he did not know whether he was going to run for re-election or not. So there was no suggestion that my coming over there was for anything other than the regular, normal type of work of a White House assistant. It is true that if an incumbent president gets deeply involved in an election campaign that the

White House staff people are quite likely to get involved in it with him just as a matter of course.

Now if I might return to your other question about his reasons for not running, I heard him talk about this several times after that and particularly when he had a meeting not long after this announcement, first with Senator Bob Kennedy and then with Vice President Humphrey. At both of those meetings the President undertook to tell them something about his reasons for deciding not to run and also something about his views as to their own candidacies.

B: Were these separate meetings?

M: These were separate meetings. They were held on the same day, one immediately after the other. Senator Kennedy came in first and he brought Ted Sorensen with him. Walt Rostow and I were there from the White House staff. They met in the Cabinet Room, and the meeting must have lasted about an hour and a half. It was scheduled for an hour, and I remember it lasted for about an hour and a half. During the last half of that, Vice President Humphrey, I think, was waiting to come in. He did not bring anyone with him, but Walt Rostow and I sat through that meeting also. I don't remember that I said [much]. I said very little during the Kennedy meeting and not very much during the Humphrey meeting. The President, after those meetings, asked Walt and me to make him some notes as to what had happened there. Walt Rostow's notes were much more lengthy than mine and I am sure much more meaningful. I don't think I would feel at liberty to talk very much about those meetings even for this purpose just now,

because it seems to me that it is so much a matter that's within the control and wishes of President Johnson, I guess I'd want express clearance before I talk about those meetings.

B: Can you say generally that they pertained to what was then the campaign for the nomination within the party?

M: Yes, that and a good many other things. I know the President spent more time talking about the Vietnamese war, and how serious he regarded that situation and why he had come to the conclusion that for the good of the country he should withdraw from the coming election.

B: Can you say in general what Mr. Johnson's attitude was toward the struggle for the Democratic nomination at that time? Was he trying to stay out of it?

M: He was trying to stay out of it. And he did by and large stay out of it. This I think surprised most people. Many people simply did not believe it to be the case, although it really was. He actually tried very little to influence it. I am quite sure of this. Of course, he was a very active man. I was not with him all the time, but I was with him enough on this subject and knew enough about what was going on in this particular field to be pretty sure that he was pretty much hands off. Of course, Senator Kennedy was killed pretty early.

B: You went to the Chicago convention. Were you there as Mr. Johnson's representative?

M: No, I was there with his knowledge, but not as his representative.

I was there as an unofficial and personal advisor to the chairman of the Platform Committee, Representative Hale Boggs of Louisiana, who had indicated to the President that he felt the need of help from time to time. Both of them knowing that I had experience working on Democratic platforms for some several times in the past had a notion that I might be helpful. Whether that notion was right or not, why, that's the reason I went to Chicago.

B: Did Mr. Johnson give you any sort of briefing before you went? You mentioned earlier that he had talked about the Vietnamese war more extensively in this connection.

M: No, he did not. He made it rather clear that anything I did about this platform I was doing on my own, and it was my business, and he was not responsible for it.

B: Did you review the draft?

M: I did talk to him on the telephone several times while I was out there, but he maintained that position right straight through that this was my problem. (Laughter)

B: Were the telephone conservations reporting to Mr. Johnson the various stages of the drafting of the platform?

M: Yes, and talking about some of the provisions in it, and particularly the plank with respect to Vietnam.

B: But he didn't say change it?

M: He did not say change it. He did not say that he would agree to it. I think there was one version that he said he would disassociate himself from. (Laughter) I think it was clear then--I know it was

clear; I think it was clear to the public; I know it was clear to me--that none of the provisions that they were considering putting in the platform about Vietnam was exactly the kind of thing that he would most have liked to have. If he had been writing it, he would have written it differently than any of them.

B: Including the final version?

M: Including the final version.

B: But the final version was considered at the time to be acceptable to Mr. Johnson's previous stands.

M: I think you might say it was acceptable and I think that is as far as you could go--to say it was acceptable.

B: This, I gather, is the fruit of phone calls between you and him at the convention.

M: That is a terribly complicated story, but I suppose the phone calls were certainly relevant. I think it is probably the fruit of my being in Chicago. I think that if I hadn't been there, it wouldn't have happened that way.

B: I dislike this kind of terminology, I guess everybody does, but you mean that if you had not been there, the plank might have been more dovish?

M: I think it might have been.

B: Maybe I am stepping out of line here, but when you are in that kind of position as you were at Chicago, you just can't help but be considered as a president's man.

M: Oh, I found that out.

B: I mean, you can say that Mr. Johnson told you to go down on your own, but still everybody is going to regard you as Mr. Johnson's man on the scene.

M: Well, everybody did, rightly or wrongly. I suppose that is the only reason why the things I said were consequential. I am sure that at one point out there some of the people that had a different view than mine about what should go in the platform on a matter that was quite controversial at the time frankly didn't know whether my view represented President Johnson or not. And they were not able to find out. They thought that it was something in the nature of a bluff possibly, but they couldn't be sure.

B: Which is what makes a good bluff.

M: Yes! So far as I know, nobody else was ever sure to this day. (Laughter)

B: I am still not sure right here now. Who thought of the idea of allowing the extended and public debate on the Vietnamese platform that occurred at the convention?

M: I don't know. I just simply don't remember. I expect I did know at the time, but I don't remember now.

B: I was wondering what Mr. Johnson's reaction to that kind of debate was.

M: I never heard him. After it started, given the situation where the debate occurred and the vote was taken, I know he was relieved that the vote went as it did and did not go the other way. Although the plank that was agreed to might not have been just what he wanted,

but at least he regarded the other one as much less desirable. And he was glad not to get the less desirable one. That is my principal recollection of his attitude and views about that debate and the results. Since the debate occurred, he was glad it turned out as it did.

B: Was there ever a possibility there that the minority plank would be adopted? What became of the minority plank?

M: Well, I don't know how you can tell about a thing like that. There was a possibility that it might have been adopted in the Platform Committee under a misapprehension as to the facts. On the floor of the convention, since the vote turned out as it did, I suppose there was never a possibility that it could turn out the other way. And I think the supporters of the majority plank were reasonably confident of winning that vote, although not altogether certain.

B: Did Mr. Johnson take this kind of interest in any other aspects of the platform?

M: I don't remember that he was that much interested in any other aspects of the platform.

I had done some work with Congressman Boggs and his Platform Committee staff, which was mostly a volunteer staff in Washington, preparing a preliminary draft before the convention. At the time that I agreed to do that, President Johnson said that I could do it if I wanted to, but he was not going to have anything to do with it. And this was literally true. I told the staff and

Congressman Boggs what my thoughts were about this. I didn't tell President Johnson what we were doing. He didn't ask me, and I didn't tell him.

B: He never saw the draft that [was prepared]?

M: I don't think that he ever saw the draft. I don't think so.

B: That's interesting. Did you go on then, to work in the campaign?

M: Practically none. The only thing that I did was this: there was an inevitable question as to how cabinet members and other government officials should participate in the campaign. This was the source of some problems and some confusion, and I worked some in trying to get those lines straightened out. I won't claim that I created confusion. I don't think I did. I think I helped alleviate it some. So about the only role that I served was something in the nature of a liaison role between the Democratic candidates and the Democratic National Committee, on one hand, and the executive branch of the government, on the other hand.

B: Some of the cabinet members did participate in the campaign, I believe?

M: That's right. I think generally the President left it up to each cabinet member to decide for himself how much he would participate in the campaign. I think there were some really taboos with some of them such as the secretary of the state and secretary of defense who traditionally do not get into partisan politics.

The President, I think, eventually gave one guideline that it would be appropriate for cabinet members to explain--I want to use

the word defend, promulgate, proclaim--the record of the Democratic Administration and to keep the record straight. And here even the Department of Defense and the Department of State were told that it was permissible for them to do this kind of thing in a factual way; and they did do some of that. Then some of the other cabinet people, as I recall, actually took an active part in the campaign in terms of making political speeches. Secretary of Agriculture [Orville] Freeman, I think, had some kind of official position in the Humphrey campaign organization.

B: One of the major questions at the time was if or how much Mr. Johnson should participate in the Humphrey campaign. Did you get involved in this one?

M: I don't remember that I did. I hate to say no without thinking about it for a while. I don't remember that I did.

B: Then after the election of now-President Nixon, you were the central coordinator for the transition period, a job which incidentally you had participated in in the 1960-61 period too, I believe.

M: No. My position in transitions--let's go back to 1952-53 to start with. I was then special counsel to President Truman. And in those days the President's special counsel had staff responsibilities right much broader than he had in more recent times. I was responsible to President Truman for the staff work on all messages and speeches and policy questions and legislative program, and so on. So during the period between the election of 1952 and the inauguration in January of 1953, I was very busy working on the State of

the Union Message President Truman did deliver in January, 1953, the Budget Message and the Economic Report and things of that kind, tidying up the presidential business in that field.

I did not get very deeply into the mechanics of the transition. Dr. John Steelman did more of that for President Truman at that time. That, by the way, the first turnover from one party to another since the--was it the 20th Amendment that changed the terms of the president's inauguration dates and so on? That was the first time this particular set of facts ever came up. So President Truman was pioneering in this. He had a personal notion, which I did not share very strongly, that he should do everything he could to turn the government over to his successors in an orderly fashion and help them get off to a good start. I was not quite that good a soldier. (Laughter) But he gave very definite instructions to his staff, including me, on that. Actually, I got the message from him before he got back to Washington. He had been home to vote in November and he sent the message to me before he got back to Washington to start preparations for an orderly turnover of government. I managed to get most of that work shifted to somebody else, because I didn't feel very enthusiastic about it. But, as a whole, the President did continue to insist on the orderly turnover, and it was done in a pretty orderly fashion. Without any reservations, he tried to get it done, did all he could to get it done as well as possible. I think that basic pattern was established at that time, and it has been improved on some in the

transitions since then, but still it's the same basic pattern.

Then in 1960 the Brookings Institution set up an advisory committee on transition to work with their professional staff people who were actually doing some serious work and serious study on this. I was a member of that committee and attended several of its meetings. That was the only connection I had with that transition except that I was appointed under secretary of agriculture at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration. And as under secretary of agriculture, I was involved in the transition, very much involved in it, in that narrower field. For example, there were briefing books prepared by the outgoing officials of the government at that time to be turned over to the incoming officials telling them as best they could things that were likely to be helpful to them. I got a set of these briefing books when I went to the Department of Agriculture.

Then in this last transition, President Johnson did designate me I believe the words were central coordinator for the administration. This designation was made, I think, in July before the conventions. I talked to him some about it at that time. He agreed that we should not do anything much on that assignment until after the conventions. One of the problems that the outgoing administration has in this kind of situation--and it is inevitable--is that people throughout the government begin looking at the next administration. And the nearer you come to inauguration day, the more this goes on. So I think it's important to try to time your moves in the transition

to get started early enough to do a workmanlike and respectable job, but not to get started too early to give people undue temptations to start serving the new administration while the old one is still here.

B: It also must make a big difference who wins in November, whether it would be a transition to a Democratic or a Republican administration.

M: That's true. We started out in early September. At the President's instructions, I sent a memorandum to all the department heads and heads of the major independent agencies, not regulatory agencies, but those that are strictly executive agencies, asking them to begin to make preparations for the transition, including particularly the preparation of written briefing materials. About the same time the President wrote a letter to the three major candidates, Vice President Humphrey, Mr. Nixon, and Governor Wallace, inviting them, if they wished at that time, to designate someone to work with me on matters that might usefully be worked on even before the election. They all did designate someone, sometime prior to the election. In Mr. Wallace's case, he designated three people, on an either/or basis. Vice President Humphrey designated two people, I believe. And Mr. Nixon designated one man, Franklin Lincoln, who was a partner in the law firm in New York City of which Mr. Nixon was a member. Then that designation of Mr. Lincoln was reaffirmed after the election. So I worked with him some before the election and continued to work with him after the election.

B: Was there much to do with the representatives of candidates before the election?

M: Not a great deal.

B: Just a matter of informing them what you were doing?

M: A matter of informing them what we were doing. One thing I think that President Johnson had in mind was to help make it respectable for candidates to think about this kind of thing and possibly even talk about it some before the election. The reason why this is a good thing is because it is such a big job that it does require, if it is to be done best, some advance planning that ought to be done before the election. In 1948 Governor Dewey was the Republican candidate, and his advance planning was done quite openly. There were a good many stories about the preparations that he and his supporters made and stories about some of them leasing houses in Washington to move into. And of course, it turned out Governor Dewey was not elected. Well, this got to be a rather sensitive point, and since then candidates have tended to shy away from making plans of this kind, working on this kind of thing, before their election. It may appear to be premature and [there's] some feeling perhaps that this was an adverse factor for Governor Dewey in the election in 1948. There may be a streak in the nature of the American people generally to want to take a man down a peg if he seems to be too cocky. Well, one of the things I think that President Johnson had in mind in 1968 was relieving this to some extent with the feeling that if all candidates were doing something

of this kind, then it would be a standoff and would not tend to help or hurt any of them.

B: Then the work must have gone into high gear after the election.

M: It did. A couple of things I think might be said about this. First, the biggest part of the transition job is on the side of the incoming administration. Just as it is when any man or group of men take over a new job or new jobs, the people taking over the jobs are the ones that have to do most of the work. Now the people that are going out can give them a lot of good advice, and they usually are quite glad to give them advice and quite honest advice. The people coming in just naturally tend not to be particularly interested in the advice of the people going out. This is true even between close friends of the same political party. Well, when you add to this some partisan feelings, it tends to make it more so. But the main part of the job is for people coming in to build, to construct, the new administration, to find people for these tremendously difficult jobs and to get those people broken loose from their present jobs and present responsibilities, and for them in turn to find out something about these jobs that they had taken on down here. This is a big job. The other thing is, if you'll note, that in both the incoming and outgoing administrations, the largest part of this is done in the departments and agencies. So I suppose my major responsibility was to see that for the outgoing administration the departments and agencies did their jobs. And they did. They did on the average, I think, quite well and

without a great deal of effort on my part. The response to that first memorandum I sent out in September was sort of carried on through pretty much as a whole.

B: How far down does this go? Obviously cabinet, sub-cabinet, down to agency chiefs. Anyone who is likely to be replaced is supposed to prepare a briefing book.

M: Yes. That was, I think, quite uniformly down through the assistant secretary level. And when you say agency chiefs? I guess agencies is usually used to denote an independent agency. It's not part of the parlance. It does include agency chiefs. There are not very many major independent agencies anymore. There are some. The Veterans Administration is one good example.

B: I was really using the wrong terminology. I mean, for example, within the Agriculture Department, the bureaus, ASCS, REA, all of those kinds of things.

M: I am sure that they would have prepared briefing papers, if not for their successors, then for the use of the incoming secretary, the incoming under secretary, the incoming assistant secretaries who would have supervision over these agencies. They need to know something about the agencies. I guess that is what they call them in the Department of Agriculture, by the way. They call them agencies. Because as I remember when I was over there, they had seventeen agencies, I guess. In one of them they had seventeen divisions. And in one of those divisions was the Packers and Stockyard Division, which administered the Packers and Stockyard

Act which is a quite comprehensive economic regulatory scheme. I used to compare to that the Interstate Commerce Commission. And I said, "Okay, you have the Interstate Commerce Commission. Within the Department of Agriculture, you have the Packers and Stockyards Division, which is one of the seventeen divisions and one of the seventeen agencies in the department. The Interstate Commerce Commission, I think, has eleven commissioners, and the Packers and Stockyards Division was run by one Grade 16 employee." (Laughter) There would have been briefing papers prepared describing each of these agencies or bureaus and their work.

B: And at the other end of the scale, this transition includes the personal briefing from Mr. Johnson to Mr. Nixon. I believe they had several meetings?

M: They did. First, right after Mr. Nixon was nominated, if I remember correctly, President Johnson invited him to come to the Ranch, and he went to the Ranch within a day or two. Then a very few days after the election--it was a holiday, it must have been the eleventh of November--the President-Elect came to visit the President at the President's invitation at the White House. I don't remember that Mr. Nixon came back after that.

B: I may be wrong, sir.

M: He may have. I know during the latter part, he did not come for several weeks before the inauguration. I was rather of the view

that it would be a good thing for the President to invite him, as I remember talking about that idea some and that it did not happen. I think there was at least one more visit which was more in the nature of a social visit perhaps. I can tell you when it was. The President-Elect Nixon had a meeting in Washington with the people he had designated to be members of his cabinet and their wives were along. Well, on the evening of that day, President-Elect and Mrs. Nixon went to the White House for the social visit with the Johnsons. The White House staff that the President-Elect had designated by that time came down to the White House Mess as guests of the Johnson White House staff for cocktails in the late afternoon. We cleared out the tables. I remember that one. There were more of the Nixon people than there were Johnson people, not that the Johnson people failed to show up. They came, but by that time there was a larger Nixon White House staff designated than the Johnson White House staff. Then the Johnson cabinet people gave a party for the Nixon cabinet people in the Department of State.

B: All the knowledge, just reading the newspapers at that time, it seemed to go very smoothly.

M: Well, it did. And it seemed to. In fact, it seemed to go more smoothly than it did, but it did go smoothly. Frank Lincoln, by the way, was a very nice person, and he and I were congenial and got along well. We agreed at the outset that when anyone asked us how the transition was going, we were going to say it was going smoothly. And we always did. We kept saying it was going smoothly,

and it kept going smoothly. It is true that there were some little things that we could have talked about that would have stirred up a little tit-for-tat business. Although they really were inconsequential, I think it might have changed the tone of it.

B: What kind of things was that?

M: Oh, I don't remember. If I did, I am not sure that I would talk about them now. I tried to put out what incipient fires there were on our side, and I am sure that Frank Lincoln did the same thing on his side. So I did think it did go smoothly. About all I did really was to work on the mechanics and some little matters that were not really of earthshaking importance.

B: Sir, I have taken a great deal of your time. Is there anything else you would like to add to this kind of record? Anything pertaining to Mr. Johnson?

M: No, I don't think of anything except it was a great privilege to me to work with him. I am very fond of him and admire him a great deal. He is sure a lot of man. I did not work for him as long as I did for President Truman and, of course, I never got to know him as well, never got as deeply into the heart of his staff operation. But it was quite an experience.

B: I bet it was. Thank you very much, sir.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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