

CSI Aviation: Overview, ICE Connections, and Controversies

1. Executive Summary:

CSI Aviation, Inc., established in 1979, has evolved into a global aviation services provider, offering a wide array of services from air charter and cargo transport to medical flights and aviation management ¹. Headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the company has cultivated a significant presence in both the commercial and government sectors, notably securing substantial contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) ¹. This report delves into CSI Aviation's operational framework, its extensive relationship with ICE, and the various allegations of corruption and scandals that have surfaced over the years. While CSI Aviation boasts a history of government service and positive testimonials in certain areas, its close association with ICE, particularly in the realm of immigrant removal, has drawn considerable scrutiny and controversy, raising questions about contract practices, operational conduct, and the ethical implications of its work.

2. Introduction:

This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of CSI Aviation, Inc., examining its origins, business operations, and its significant role as a contractor for the U.S. government, particularly ICE. Founded in 1979, CSI Aviation has grown from a charter aircraft arrangement service to a multifaceted aviation company with a global reach ³. This analysis will explore the history and evolution of CSI Aviation, its diverse service offerings, and its extensive contractual relationship with ICE, which has become a major source of its revenue. Furthermore, the report will investigate various allegations of corruption and scandals that have been associated with the company, shedding light on the controversies that have marked its operations. By synthesizing available information, this report seeks to offer a balanced perspective on CSI Aviation's activities and its impact within the aviation industry and the context of government services.

3. CSI Aviation: Company Overview:

3.1. History and Founding:

CSI Aviation was founded in 1979 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, by Allen Weh, a retired colonel in the United States Marine Corps Reserve ¹. Initially incorporated as Charter Services, Inc., the company's early focus was on arranging chartered aircraft, primarily large airline aircraft, for customers in the United States following the

deregulation of the airline industry³. Over time, the company became widely known as "CSI" by both its clients and staff, leading to the retention of these initials when the company expanded its services and rebranded³. The founder's military background likely played a role in shaping the company's early trajectory, potentially facilitating its later entry into government contracting. The organic evolution of the company name reflects a growing brand recognition and a broadening scope of operations beyond its initial charter service focus.

In 1984, CSI Aviation secured its first contract with the U.S. Government, marking a significant step in its development³. Several years later, the company further solidified its position in the government sector by obtaining a GSA Federal Supply Schedule, which streamlined the process for federal agencies to procure its services³. To enhance its operational capabilities, CSI acquired its first aircraft, an MD-83, propelling the company to a new level of service provision³. Demonstrating an early connection to the defense sector, CSI began representing various United States airlines to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) through the U.S. Military Traffic Command in 1983. This role involved coordinating domestic and international military scheduled and air charter requirements under the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) program¹. This early involvement with the DOD laid the groundwork for future, more substantial contracts.

As the company continued to grow, it diversified its service offerings. In 2009, CSI began providing fuel services, further expanding its logistical capabilities¹. A significant development occurred in 2014 when CSI acquired a Texas-based Part 135 operation, enabling it to conduct its own flight operations¹. This move allowed for greater control and flexibility in its service delivery. In 2016, CSI's Part 135 division expanded to include Medical Flight Services, which received accreditation from the National Accreditation Alliance of Medical Transport Applications (NAAMTA) from 2017 onwards¹. This expansion into specialized medical transport highlighted the company's adaptability and responsiveness to evolving market needs.

CSI Aviation has also demonstrated a commitment to supporting disaster relief efforts, as evidenced by the deployment of a Seeker Aircraft to Southeast Texas in September 2017 in response to Hurricane Harvey¹. The company's support for military personnel was recognized in 2017 when it was awarded the Freedom Award by the Department of Defense¹. Further strengthening its ties with the DOD, CSI Aviation was certified by the U.S. Military Commercial Airlift Review Board (CARB) in 2018, allowing it to operate on-demand passenger, cargo, and air medical flights for the department¹. A major milestone was achieved in 2019 when CSI was awarded a position on a \$5.7 billion contract to provide worldwide airlift services for the U.S. Department of Defense¹.

That same year, CSI began operating daily flights under contract for the U.S. Navy between West Palm Beach, Florida, and a Navy base in the Bahama Islands ¹. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, CSI was tasked by U.S. Health and Human Services to airlift nearly two thousand passengers from a cruise ship docked in Oakland, California, showcasing its ability to handle complex logistical challenges in emergency situations ¹. More recently, in February 2025, CSI Aviation was awarded a \$128 million contract to remove immigrants pursuant to the enforcement of the Alien Enemies Act, indicating a significant and potentially controversial role in immigration enforcement ¹. This historical progression illustrates a company that has consistently expanded its capabilities and deepened its involvement with government agencies, particularly in areas requiring specialized aviation services.

3.2. Core Business and Services:

CSI Aviation operates as a worldwide aviation services company, holding a FAR Part 135 air carrier certificate with global operating authority ¹. The company provides a broad spectrum of air charter and aviation services to both corporations and government agencies ¹. CSI also maintains a GSA Schedule, facilitating its work with the federal government ¹. Its core services include passenger charter and cargo air transportation, catering to diverse needs ranging from individual travel to large-scale logistical movements ¹. A significant aspect of CSI's business is its provision of medical flight services, including air ambulance operations, equipped to handle critical medical transport requirements ¹.

Beyond transportation, CSI Aviation offers comprehensive aviation program management, including the operation of large aircraft under Part 121 regulations ². The company prides itself on its ability to solve complex aviation requirements and manage intricate aviation logistics ². Executive jet charter services are also a part of their portfolio, catering to corporate and individual clients seeking premium air travel ². CSI's service offerings extend to aviation management, encompassing air transportation, aviation logistics, and fuel management ⁴. Additionally, the company provides aircraft leasing and maintenance support, offering comprehensive solutions for aircraft owners and operators ⁴. In situations requiring rapid response, CSI offers emergency response services, highlighting its adaptability to urgent needs ⁹. For specialized missions, CSI can provide mission-specific aircraft, including those equipped for surveillance purposes ³. Furthermore, the company is involved in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations, indicating its capacity to support sensitive government and corporate requirements ³. This wide array of services positions CSI Aviation as a versatile player in the global aviation market,

capable of meeting diverse and often complex demands.

3.3. Operational Scope and Locations:

CSI Aviation operates on a worldwide scale, providing its services across the globe ¹. The company's headquarters are located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which serves as a central hub for its operations ¹. In addition to its headquarters, CSI maintains operating bases in Killeen, Texas, and West Palm Beach, Florida, strategically positioned to support its diverse service commitments ¹. These bases allow CSI to efficiently manage its operations throughout the United States and in locations outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS) ³. To further extend its reach and capabilities, CSI Aviation has established a global network of qualified and carefully screened aviation partners ². This network enables the company to provide flight and support services virtually anywhere in the world, ensuring its ability to meet the demands of its international clientele and government contracts. The strategic placement of its bases and the reliance on a global partner network underscore CSI's commitment to providing comprehensive aviation solutions with worldwide coverage.

3.4. Fleet of Aircraft:

CSI Aviation operates its own fleet of twin-engine high-performance Beechcraft turboprops, including the C90, B-200, B-300 series, and B-1900D models, commonly known as King Air aircraft ¹. These aircraft are favored for their strong safety record, passenger comfort, speed, and overall reliability, making them well-suited for various missions, including medical transport ¹. The company employs both large and small aircraft to support its diverse range of services, including medically configured aircraft equipped with the latest technology for air ambulance missions ³. Through its extensive experience in the aviation industry, CSI also has access to a wide selection of aircraft worldwide, allowing it to arrange charter flights using helicopters, turboprops, executive jets, and commercial airliners, depending on the specific requirements of the mission ⁴.

For commercial operations, CSI can provide aircraft ranging from the Dornier 328, with a capacity of up to 30 seats, to regional jets accommodating 50 to 70 passengers, and narrow-body jets seating 140 to 270 individuals ¹². For larger groups, the company can arrange wide-body jet aircraft with capacities ranging from 270 to 400 passengers ¹². Additionally, CSI offers First Class and VIP aircraft with various seating configurations to meet the needs of executive and high-end clientele ¹². This access to a diverse fleet, both owned and through its network, ensures that CSI Aviation can provide the appropriate aircraft for any given task, whether it's a small medical

evacuation or a large-scale passenger or cargo transport operation.

3.5. Leadership Team:

The leadership of CSI Aviation, Inc. is comprised of experienced professionals guiding the company's strategic direction and operational activities. Allen Weh, the founder, continues to serve as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), providing long-standing leadership and vision ¹. Key members of the executive team include David Orehek, the Vice President of Administration; Gabriel Candelaria, the Chief Aviation Operations Specialist; and Ian Dagley, the Vice President of Flight Operations ¹⁴. Overseeing flight operations at a more granular level are Jacob Webb, the Chief Pilot, and Alex Katkov, who holds the dual roles of FAA Designated Director of Operations and Vice President of Flight Operations ¹⁴. Ensuring the company's engagement with the government sector is Rich Delucia, the Senior Vice President of Government Services, while Shane Farmer serves as the Senior Vice President of Medical Operations ¹⁴. The technical aspects of the fleet are managed by Terry Thompson, the VP of MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul), and John (Doug) McKinney, the FAA Designated Director of Maintenance ¹⁴. Tommy Dunn holds the position of Executive Vice President, and Travis Reinhardt serves as the Chief Inspector ¹⁴. Additionally, John Fugedy is the FAA Designated Assistant Director of Operations and Director of Standards & Training ¹⁶. Raul Alvarado is the IT Manager, supporting the technological infrastructure ¹⁵. Notably, Deborah Maestas, daughter of Allen Weh, has served as a former President of CSI and is currently listed as a corporate director ¹⁷. This leadership structure reflects a comprehensive approach to managing the various facets of CSI Aviation's business, with experienced individuals at the helm of key operational and administrative areas. The founder's continued involvement suggests a strong influence on the company's culture and direction, while the presence of family members in leadership roles may have implications for the company's governance and relationships.

4. CSI Aviation and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):

4.1. History of Contracts with ICE:

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has become a primary client for CSI Aviation, serving as the source of the majority of the company's federal revenue ¹⁷. Since 2005, CSI has been awarded at least \$1.6 billion in federal funding through contracts with ICE, with a notable surge in business in recent years ¹⁷. This long-standing relationship was further solidified in February 2025 when ICE awarded CSI Aviation a no-bid contract valued at up to \$128 million for the removal of

immigrants ¹. This contract, initially set for six months with the possibility of a year-long extension, was subsequently modified by ICE to increase the number of removal flights, indicating an escalating demand for CSI's services in this area ¹⁷. In addition to this recent award, CSI Aviation secured a significant five-year contract with ICE in March 2024, with a potential value of up to \$3.6 billion ¹⁷. These substantial contracts highlight the critical role CSI Aviation plays in supporting ICE's mission. It is also noted that CSI Aviation maintains various service contracts with numerous government agencies concurrently, suggesting a broad engagement across different sectors of the federal government ⁴. The consistent acquisition of contracts, particularly with ICE, demonstrates a strong and evolving partnership between the two entities.

4.2. Nature of Services Provided to ICE:

The primary service CSI Aviation provides to ICE is the transportation of immigrants via flights, commonly referred to as deportation flights ¹. CSI operates daily scheduled large aircraft and special high-risk charter flights to facilitate ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) ⁶. To manage the high volume of these flights, CSI Aviation utilizes a network of subcontractors, including companies like GlobalX ¹⁷. Notably, in 2023, a significant majority (74%) of ICE's 1,564 removal flights were conducted using GlobalX planes under contract with CSI ¹⁷. This indicates that CSI often acts as a prime contractor, overseeing and coordinating the logistical aspects of these deportation operations through its network of partners. Historically, CSI's involvement with immigration-related transportation dates back to at least 2005-2006, as evidenced by a contract (HSBP1005C00932) that involved providing air and bus transportation services from Tucson International Airport in Tucson, Arizona, to Mexico City International Airport in support of the Mexican Interior Repatriation Program (MIRP) ²⁰. This historical context underscores a long-term engagement in facilitating the movement of individuals as part of immigration enforcement efforts.

4.3. Financial Value of ICE Contracts:

CSI Aviation has received a total of over \$1.9 billion in federal contracts ⁶. A significant portion of this, at least \$1.6 billion, has been awarded by ICE since 2005, highlighting the agency's importance as a revenue source for the company ¹⁷. The five-year contract awarded in March 2024 has a potential value of up to \$3.6 billion, representing a substantial future revenue stream ¹⁷. Additionally, the no-bid contract secured in February 2025 is valued at up to \$128 million ¹⁷. Further demonstrating the ongoing financial relationship, a current award for contract CONT_AWD_70CDCR24FR0000024_7012_GS33F0025V_4730 stands at \$325.0 million

²¹. These figures underscore the immense financial value that ICE contracts hold for CSI Aviation, indicating a significant reliance on this government agency for its business operations and revenue generation.

4.4. Controversies and Criticisms Surrounding ICE Operations:

ICE's operations, particularly those involving the removal of immigrants, have been subject to considerable criticism and are often shrouded in secrecy, according to the University of Washington's Center for Human Rights ¹⁷. The recent no-bid contract awarded to CSI Aviation in February 2025 has drawn scrutiny, especially in light of allegations from a competing company, Classic Air Charter, which claims that taxpayers could potentially overpay CSI by hundreds of millions of dollars under a longer-term contract ¹⁷. Classic Air Charter has asserted in court filings that CSI's bid was "absurdly high," exceeding their competitors' offers by as much as half a billion dollars ¹⁷. In response to such concerns, ICE has explained its decision to award the interim contract without competition by citing the high priority and urgency placed on immigration enforcement, including deportation, by the Trump administration. ICE stated that it was "unable to compete an interim contract" and that awarding it to the incumbent, CSI, was the "only solution" due to these pressing circumstances ¹⁷. These controversies highlight concerns about the transparency and cost-effectiveness of ICE's contracting practices, particularly with CSI Aviation, and raise questions about the potential for overspending in the pursuit of immigration enforcement objectives.

5. Allegations of Corruption and Scandals:

5.1. The 2017 Somali Deportation Flight Incident and Subsequent Lawsuit:

A significant scandal involving a CSI Aviation-contracted flight occurred in late 2017 when 92 Somali immigrants were subjected to harsh conditions for nearly two days ¹⁷. The aircraft remained on a tarmac for approximately 23 hours, during which the immigrants were not permitted to disembark ¹⁷. During this prolonged period, the detainees were reportedly kept bound with handcuffs secured to their waists and their feet shackled together ¹⁷. The lawsuit filed by the passengers in December 2017 detailed unsanitary conditions, including toilets that overflowed, forcing some to urinate into bottles or on themselves ¹⁷. The complaint also alleged instances of abuse by ICE agents, including the use of full-body restraints on those who protested or asked questions, as well as kicking, striking, dragging, and verbal abuse ¹⁷. The flight, which departed from Texas and made a stop in Senegal for a crew change en route to Somalia, was delayed because the replacement flight crew was unable to obtain the legally required rest due to power outages at their hotel ¹⁷. ICE subsequently

attempted to attribute blame for the incident to CSI Aviation, arguing that the company should have ensured the replacement crew was accommodated at a different hotel, a hotel with a backup generator, or had additional crews on standby ¹⁷. The legal dispute stemming from this incident was eventually resolved months later, with ICE agreeing to pay CSI Aviation \$32 million for this particular flight and other work for which CSI claimed it had not been fully compensated by the government ¹⁷. This event brought to light serious concerns regarding the treatment of individuals during deportation flights and the oversight of contracted services.

5.2. The 2017 Aircraft Smoke Incident:

In another incident in 2017, a plane operated by a subcontractor of CSI Aviation experienced a significant safety issue when the cabin filled with smoke and fumes ¹⁷. This event caused both the detained immigrants and the contract security guards on board to experience difficulty breathing and to panic ¹⁷. There were 129 detained immigrants on the aircraft at the time of the incident ¹⁷. This occurrence raises concerns about the maintenance and operational safety standards of the aircraft used in these deportation flights, as well as the potential risks to the individuals being transported and the personnel involved.

5.3. Legal Challenges to ICE Contract Awards (e.g., Classic Air Charter Protest):

CSI Aviation has been involved in legal challenges related to the awarding of ICE contracts. For instance, Classic Air Charter, a competitor, protested the issuance of an air charter services order to them by ICE, alleging that CSI's quotation contained material misrepresentations and that the agency's evaluation process was unreasonable and disparate ²². The Government Accountability Office (GAO) ultimately denied this protest ²². While the GAO did identify errors in ICE's evaluation of Classic Air Charter's corporate experience and past performance, as well as instances of unequal discussions, they concluded that CSI was not competitively prejudiced by these errors ²². The GAO reasoned that even if these errors were corrected and CSI had addressed its identified weaknesses, the best value decision, which favored Classic Air Charter due to its strengths in technical approach and a significant price advantage, would likely have remained unchanged ²².

However, Classic Air Charter also initiated a separate legal challenge, alleging that ICE might end up paying CSI Aviation an excessive amount, potentially \$500 million more than necessary, under a longer-term contract due to what they described as an "absurdly high" bid from CSI ¹⁷. This ongoing legal challenge underscores persistent concerns about the cost-effectiveness and fairness of ICE's contracting practices

with CSI Aviation, particularly regarding the substantial financial implications of these agreements.

5.4. Contract Disputes with ICE and GSA:

CSI Aviation has been engaged in several contract disputes with both ICE and the General Services Administration (GSA), which have led to multiple appeals before the Civilian Board of Contract Appeals (CBCA) ²³. These disputes encompass a range of issues, including ICE's claim for liquidated damages related to the unavailability of a flight crew for a flight to Somalia, which CSI argued was due to an excusable delay ²³. Another point of contention involved CSI seeking payment for flights to Somalia that were cancelled by ICE with less than fourteen days' notice ²³. Additionally, CSI sought additional payments for flights based on a provision in the schedule contract that allowed for the rounding of flight times up to the nearest hour ²³. A further dispute involved CSI's claim for cancellation fees for over 600 flights that were allegedly cancelled within fourteen days of the scheduled departure ²³. In most of these appeals, the CBCA denied the cross-motions for summary judgment, finding that while contract interpretation issues could be addressed, there were disputed material facts that required further proceedings to resolve the claims arising from the ICE task orders ²³. These numerous contract disputes suggest a pattern of disagreements between CSI Aviation and the government agencies it contracts with, particularly concerning the interpretation and execution of contract terms, as well as payment for services rendered.

5.5. Department of Transportation (DOT) Issues Regarding Brokerage Services:

In 2009, the Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a cease and desist order to CSI Aviation, asserting that the company was acting as an unauthorized broker of air-charter services for the federal government without the necessary certification ²⁴. The DOT argued that CSI's activities under its GSA schedule listing constituted "indirect air transportation," which required a certificate of authority under the Federal Aviation Act ²⁴. CSI challenged this determination, contending that the Act's certification requirement applied only to companies operating "as a common carrier," and that its charter flights for the federal government did not meet this definition ²⁴. The GSA supported CSI's position, arguing that the certification requirements for common carriage were not relevant to government contracts due to the existing protections in place for federal agencies ²⁴. Ultimately, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit granted CSI's petition for review, finding that the DOT's order was arbitrary and capricious because the agency had failed to adequately explain why the Federal Aviation Act required certification for air charter

brokers operating under a GSA contract, especially considering the definition of "air transportation" included the provision of service "as a common carrier" ²⁴. The court remanded the case back to the DOT for further consideration, indicating that CSI had presented a valid argument against the DOT's initial interpretation. This episode highlights the complexities of regulatory oversight in the context of government contracting for specialized services.

5.6. Political Connections of Key Personnel:

Key figures associated with CSI Aviation have demonstrated notable political connections. Allen Weh, the company's CEO and founder, was reportedly involved in a national scandal during the George W. Bush administration, where he allegedly pushed for the removal of the top federal prosecutor in New Mexico ¹⁷. Emails and an inspector general probe purportedly indicated Weh's involvement in this matter ¹⁷. Furthermore, Deborah Maestas, Weh's daughter and a former president of CSI who currently serves as a corporate director, was identified as one of the "fake electors" involved in a scheme to challenge the results of the 2020 presidential election ¹⁷. Additionally, CSI Aviation itself hosted a campaign rally for Donald Trump, further illustrating the company's political affiliations ¹⁷. These connections suggest that CSI Aviation and its leadership maintain significant ties to political figures and movements, which could potentially play a role in the company's ability to secure and retain government contracts. The involvement of key personnel in political controversies also raises ethical considerations regarding the intersection of business and political activities.

6. Customer Reviews and Testimonials:

6.1. Positive Testimonials:

CSI Aviation has received positive feedback from various clients, particularly in the area of medical flight services. Deric and Kim Dutton expressed their sincere appreciation for the company's assistance in bringing their "Pa" home, commending the seamless and sympathetic flight orchestration by the CSI Aviation team ²⁵. Richard Turner of Bahamas Petroleum Company praised CSI Aviation's dedication, expertise, communication, innovation, and teamwork throughout their operations ²⁵. Anastacio Valverde described CSI Aviation as a "great company" dedicated to serving communities, highlighting their top-notch charter services with attention to detail and the highly trained medical personnel for their Med Evac services ²⁵. Lili PoHu thanked Chris Encinias from CSI Aviation for a smooth, reassuring, and successful air ambulance transfer for her husband, acknowledging his professionalism and the

skillful handling of the entire process ²⁵. M. Flatley expressed gratitude to Stacy for her assistance with insurance navigation and to the entire team for the transportation from Los Alamos to Albuquerque, referring to the flight attendants as "flying angels" ²⁵. Furthermore, CSI Aviation has consistently achieved performance ratings of 99% or better in its government contracts, indicating a high level of satisfaction from its government clients ⁸. The company also holds an ARGUS Gold Rating for charter air carriers and accreditation from the National Accreditation Alliance of Medical Transport Applications (NAAMTA) for its medical flight services, signifying adherence to industry standards and a commitment to quality ³. These positive testimonials and high ratings suggest that CSI Aviation generally provides satisfactory and reliable services to its customers, particularly in the specialized areas of charter flights and medical transportation.

6.2. Negative Sentiment and Discussion:

Despite the positive testimonials in certain areas, there is a notable presence of negative sentiment and critical discussion surrounding CSI Aviation, particularly concerning its involvement with ICE. A Reddit post discussing the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) investigation into CSI's ICE contracts carries a negative tone, emphasizing the controversies associated with the company ²⁷. The subreddit where this post was shared, r/immigration, is generally focused on discussions about immigration news, policies, and enforcement, often from a critical perspective ²⁷. The POGO investigation itself highlights potential issues of overspending and controversial incidents related to ICE contracts with CSI Aviation ¹⁷. The focus on no-bid contracts, allegations of inflated pricing, and incidents like the Somali deportation flight have contributed to a negative public perception of CSI Aviation's role in immigration enforcement ¹⁷. This contrast between positive individual testimonials and the negative public discourse surrounding the ICE contracts underscores the reputational challenges that CSI Aviation faces due to its involvement in politically sensitive government operations.

7. Conclusion:

CSI Aviation has established itself as a significant player in the global aviation services industry, demonstrating a long history of providing charter, cargo, and medical flight services to both commercial and government clients ¹. The company's growth, marked by strategic acquisitions and expansions in service offerings, has led to substantial contracts with key government agencies, most notably the Department of Defense and Immigration and Customs Enforcement ¹. While CSI Aviation has garnered positive feedback for its services in certain sectors and maintains high performance ratings in

government contracts, its close relationship with ICE, particularly in the area of immigrant removal, has become a focal point of controversy⁸. Allegations of inflated contract prices, coupled with disturbing incidents such as the 2017 Somali deportation flight, have raised serious questions about the ethical and operational aspects of the company's work¹⁷. Legal challenges and ongoing contract disputes further highlight the complexities and potential issues within CSI Aviation's government contracting practices²². The political connections of the company's leadership also add another layer to the scrutiny surrounding its operations¹⁷. Ultimately, CSI Aviation presents a complex picture of a successful aviation company deeply intertwined with government services, operating in a sector that often faces intense public and political debate, leading to both commendation and considerable criticism.

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