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MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

MWP 2009/01

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16 January - 7 April 1906

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ISSN 1830-7728

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Printed in Italy
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu
cadmus.eui.eu

Abstract

In 1905, Europe was faced with a serious diplomatic crisis over Morocco. In fact, the tensions this crisis unleashed were so significant that to this day it is constantly cited as one of the factors that led to the outbreak of war in 1914. Yet despite the almost universal consensus among historians as to the importance of the 'First Moroccan Crisis' its peaceful resolution through an international conference at Algeiras in 1906 remains an under-researched theme. Little attention has been paid to how European states successfully defused this crisis situation, without resort to war, through painstaking negotiation. This article aims to reassess Algeiras, through a case study of the conference, which examines its significance in terms of two key questions. First, it will look at what the Algeiras conference reveals about the system of international relations in 1906. Second, it will explore how German imperialism towards Morocco manifested itself and whether in the Moroccan case we can draw any broader conclusions to add to the wider historiographical debate as to whether Germany followed the norms of the international colonial system during this period or broke with them. The article will contend that the German attempt to gain colonial influence in Morocco offers a valuable insight into Germany's position within the international imperial system and its role in the late imperialism of the immediate prewar years. It will conclude by suggesting that although overall the international system was remarkably robust in 1906, Algeiras marked a diplomatic turning point in German imperial policy and revealed underlying tensions between the evolving European alliance system and an older system of 'diplomatic imperialism.'

Keywords

Algeiras, Morocco, 1905, 1906, Conference, Moroccan Crisis, imperialism, Germany, France, Entente

Introduction

In 1905, Europe was faced with a serious diplomatic crisis over Morocco. In fact, the tensions this unleashed were so significant that to this day the crisis is constantly cited as one of the factors that led to the outbreak of war in 1914.¹ Yet despite the almost universal consensus among historians as to the importance of the 'First Moroccan Crisis' its peaceful resolution through an international conference at Algeciras in 1906 remains an under-researched theme.² Little attention has been paid to how European states successfully defused this crisis situation, without resort to war, through painstaking negotiation.

This article aims to reassess Algeciras, through a case study of the conference which examines its significance in terms of two key questions. First, it will look at what the Algeciras conference reveals about the system of international relations in 1906. As Matthias Schulz has recently argued, historians need to look more closely at the existence of a 'Concert of Europe' before 1914 and the "behavioral norms, international procedures of collective decision-making and other principles and practices," such as diplomatic conferences, that it used to resolve international problems.³ Algeciras offers a prime example of how such processes operated – rather than being seen as a turning-point on the road to war, it can be interpreted as an example of how a sophisticated system of international 'grand diplomacy' actually kept peace in Europe. Moreover, the Algeciras conference allows us to explore whether this international system of conflict resolution, through diplomacy and conferences, was already in trouble by 1906 – something which would help explain why it was abandoned in July 1914, despite British attempts to launch negotiations, with such serious consequences for Europe. In this regard, this article contributes to the current historiographical debate regarding the period 1900-1914 which focuses upon whether war in 1914 was a logical, predictable outcome of long-term trends in prewar politics or actually marked a break with them.⁴ A mere eight years before the Great War, the conference of Algeciras thus provides both an insight into the workings of the prewar international 'Concert' and a litmus test as to its robustness, as this paper will show. This, in turn, will allow us to reassess the real role of imperialism in disrupting the 'Concert of Europe.'

Second, the conference of Algeciras is relevant to the ongoing historiographical debate regarding the nature of German imperialism. Recent works by Jürgen Zimmerer and Isabel Hull, among others, have highlighted the violent nature of the German colonial project in Africa, with particular emphasis upon the horrific genocide of the Herero population between 1904 and 1907 and its legacies for German military culture.⁵ Both point to this 1904-07 experience as a turning-point in the German imperial project. A recent pivotal article by Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski has, in turn, tried to

¹ To give but a few examples, see its brief mention in Völker Berghahn, *Imperial Germany, 1871-1914. Economy, Society, Culture and Politics* (Oxford: 1994), p 279 or the overview discussion in David Stevenson's *1914-1918. The History of the First World War* (London: 2004), p. 19, where it is described as the 'first big pre-war diplomatic crisis.' See also the very short overview in Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, *To Arms* (Oxford: 2001), p. 16.

² The major historiographical works in English on Algeciras are still E. N. Anderson's *The First Moroccan Crisis, 1904-1906*, published in 1930 and Geoffrey Butler's chapter on Anglo-German rivalry at the conference, published in 1967. E. N. Anderson, *The First Moroccan Crisis, 1904-1906* (Chicago: 1930); Butler, Geoffrey, "Anglo-German Rivalry at the Algeciras Conference," in P. Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis eds, *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

³ Matthias Schulz, "Did Norms Matter in Nineteenth-Century International Relations? Progress and Decline in the 'Culture of Peace' before World War I" in Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson eds, *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914* (Oxford; New York: Berghahn, 2007), p. 43.

⁴ On this debate see: Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson, "An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture Before 1914" in Afflerbach and Stevenson eds, *An Improbable War*, pp.1-11. On the origins of the war see: E. R. May and S. R. Williamson, Jr, 'An Identity of Opinion: Historians and July 1914,' *Journal of Modern History* (2007).

⁵ Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz. Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster: 2007); Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca; London: 2005)

contextualize this German colonial violence in South-West and East Africa, arguing that it did not mark an international watershed in terms of violence against indigenous populations; similar colonial practices of conquest and exploitation were practiced by other contemporary imperial powers, including the United States and France.⁶ However, this historiographical debate has been focused particularly upon German military violence in its southern African colonies; Germany's aims and actions towards North African colonial acquisition during the same period have not been discussed. Revisiting the conference of Algeciras, which occurred at the same time as the Herero and Nama wars, allows us to view German imperialism from another angle. This is in no way to deflect from the vital importance of the current discussions regarding Germany's appalling record in South-West and East Africa. Rather it is to ask how German imperialism towards Morocco manifested itself and whether in the Moroccan case we can draw any broader conclusions to add to the wider historiographical debate as to whether Germany followed the norms of the international colonial system during this period or broke with them. The German attempt to gain colonial influence in Morocco, in other words, offers a valuable insight into Germany's position within the international imperial system and its role in the late imperialism of the immediate prewar years.

Morocco, of course, it must be noted, was a very different case from German South-West or German East Africa. In 1905-6, Morocco, unlike Germany's southern colonies, had not yet been colonized and Germany was involved in jockeying for favorable trading rights in Moroccan territory, in the face of competition from other Great Powers, notably France and Spain. This involved German negotiations with the local regime, the Sultan and his court, as well as a long drawn out process of high diplomacy between the Great Powers, all of which limited Germany's room for manoeuvre.

The Moroccan Crisis of 1905 and the subsequent conference of Algeciras thus epitomize imperialism at its most economic and diplomatic; the violence involved in conquering colonial territory through warfare or quashing insurrections using military force played less of a role in Morocco at this stage. It was the allocation of economic rights that mattered. This was part of a greater economic colonization strategy, which the French termed *pénétration pacifique* (peaceful penetration), perhaps best explained in Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world systems theory' which outlines how economies beyond the centre of the advanced European powers were penetrated and controlled or 'peripheralized' in the interests of the centre within a burgeoning 'world' economic system.⁷ The conference of Algeciras in 1906 thus serves as a reminder that colonialism in 1905-1906 took many forms; the violent genocide in Germany's southern African colonies was paralleled by German claims to be the protector of the Sultan's interests, and the economic interests of the Moroccan people.

However, although there was clearly a stark contrast between the level of violence used to quash the Herero uprising and the German conciliatory attempts to woo the Sultan, this should not lead us to overlook the crucial role that threats of violence played in the Moroccan case in 1905-6. Significantly, Germany gained leverage against competing colonial powers with interests in Morocco by threatening to go to war with other European states if its demands regarding Morocco were not met. The question of violence also underpinned the negotiations between the powers at the Algeciras conference regarding trading rights in Morocco: the powers argued that the Moroccan state could not protect European traders who, they claimed, were being attacked and as a result Morocco should cede policing rights to European states. In this way, the most fundamental definition of state sovereignty in Weberian political theory – the state's sole legitimate right to use force – was removed from the Moroccan regime at Algeciras. This was a process of colonialisation by stealth as the allocation of European economic spheres of influence in Morocco was accompanied by the allocation of the right to police. This kind of colonialism – the allocation of 'spheres of influence' rather than the direct takeover of a country by a conquering army – was often a prelude to later colonial violence: after acquiring initial trading rights, imperial powers frequently occupied a territory to protect their

⁶ Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, "Der Holocaust als 'kolonialer Genozid'? Europäische Kolonialgewalt und nationalsozialistischer Vernichtungskrieg," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 33, 2007, pp. 439-466.

⁷ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: 2005), p. 18.

economic interests and used military force to sustain their hegemony, a cycle which could lead to outright colonial annexation of the area. All the Great Powers in 1905-6 were aware that this was the likely outcome for Morocco; thus ultimate colonialization was the prize that lurked behind the veneer of the Algeciras negotiations about trade and policing.

Given this reality, the focus in the following analysis will be upon the fraught question of policing in Morocco, which dominated the Algeciras conference, as policing was deeply implicated in sovereignty issues. Thus a micro-analysis of the conference discussions on policing is particularly revealing of both the international system for resolving colonial disputes and Germany's imperial policy towards Morocco.⁸

The Morocco Question and the 'Concert of Europe'

Morocco has become synonymous with prewar Franco-German animosity. Bordering upon France's North African colonies of Tunisia and Algeria and governed by a weak Sultan who was fighting a rival claimant to the Sultanate, it was seen by the French as an extremely desirable colonial acquisition, a means of securing North African hegemony. As one of the last remaining uncolonized parts of Africa, it had also attracted the attention of Germany, engaged in its new policy of *Weltpolitik* or, in the famous words of Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, the search for 'a place in the sun.'⁹ Ultimately, these two countries' competing claims led to a clash over Morocco in 1905 that raised real fears of war in the European press: for example, the *Journal de Rouen* asked "Is it to be peace? Is it to be war?" and the *Potsdamer Tageszeitung* stated that world peace depended on the Algeciras conference.¹⁰ Friedrich von Holstein, the secretive director of the Political Division of the German Foreign Ministry, claimed in January 1906 that there was a danger that France: "might seek to create a *fait accompli* by invading Morocco. The Sultan would appeal to the Emperor [the German Kaiser] and war would be the result."¹¹ Thus the 1905 crisis was real and sustained; moreover, like any international political crisis, it risked escalation – significantly, contemporaries compared the dispute over Morocco to the contested Balkan region and discussed whether the international policing system adopted in Macedonia might serve as a model for Morocco.¹² Yet while the Balkans drew neighbouring European powers into conflict in 1912, 1913 and again, into a much broader conflagration in 1914, war did not break out between Germany and France over Morocco in 1905-1906.

Several factors explain why this was the case. First, competition was not unusual in the pre-1914 process of overseas colonialization and a system of international diplomacy had developed between the great powers to navigate disputes peacefully. A number of incidents illustrated this process prior to Morocco: Fashoda provided a remarkably similar example where Britain and France both laid dual claim to the Sudan. Egypt proved another point of Anglo-French tension. The policy of the 'open door' in China offers an additional case. In all these examples, the powers involved had responded to the problem of multiple colonial claims through successful negotiations among themselves – facilitated by the prewar 'Concert of Europe.'

⁸ This approach is based upon Carlo Ginzburg's argument that "by knowing less, by narrowing the scope of our inquiry, we hope to understand more" made in his article "Latitude, Slaves and the Bible: An Experiment in Microhistory," *Critical Inquiry*, 31 (Spring, 2005), pp. 665-683, p. 665.

⁹ Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2004) p. 147.

¹⁰ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (GstA), I Nachlass Radowitz, (D.J.15b) CNr2 Bd 2, Press Cuttings.

¹¹ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley, eds, (London: 1927), HMSO, 1926-1938, vol. III, no. 240, Sir F. Lascelles, British Ambassador to Germany to Edward Grey, 13 January 1906.

¹² *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871-1914*, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Paris: 1930), 2^e série, vol. ix, part i, no. 97, Camille Barrère, French Ambassador to Italy to Maurice Rouvier, French Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs, 31 January 1906; *Die Grösse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, vol. xxi, part 1, no. 7035, Memorandum by Friedrich von Holstein, 22 February 1906.

Thus the avoidance of war over colonization was not accidental good fortune; nor did imperialism operate in opposition to the 'European balance and Concert of Power' system as some historians and political scientists have argued.¹³ By 1900, a sophisticated culture of diplomatic negotiation had developed to enable European states to acquire extra-European colonies without this process leading to war in Europe – tensions between major colonial powers over particular areas were resolved through negotiations, territory swaps and bargaining. This process, which might be termed 'diplomatic imperialism' was one of the major features of the prewar international system. It must be emphasized that this system of 'diplomatic imperialism' was not ideologically anti-war; it merely aimed to avoid conflict between European powers and did not preclude war between the colonizing power and the indigenous people, which continued throughout this period, the most significant examples being the 1911-12 war between Italy and Libya and the German genocidal war against the Herero people in German South-West Africa.¹⁴

A second factor which strengthened this European system of 'diplomatic imperialism' in the early 1900s was a French shift away from traditional conquest by direct military invasion to prioritizing colonization through *pénétration pacifique* – the economic and cultural infiltration of a country by making it a French sphere of influence. In the case of Morocco, this took the form of providing French bank loans, advice and military assistance. It also involved stirring up dissent within the state to weaken the Sultan: according to the historian, James Cooke, much of the so-called anarchy in Morocco was created by French agents and deliberately exaggerated in the French press.¹⁵ This process of colonization through establishing 'spheres of influence' was subtle and incorporated negotiation with other potential rival powers – in fact given that the emphasis was upon trade, this colonization approach, based upon agreement with other powers, was advantageous, diffusing tensions which might disrupt access to European markets.

Pénétration Pacifique meant that France could colonize Morocco with less effort and expense than a military expedition would demand.¹⁶ Championed by the French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé, it provides a clear illustration of the parameters within which 'diplomatic imperialism' operated. France carefully arranged a series of treaties with the other European powers which had potential rival claims to Morocco and might object to French infiltration, offering compensation elsewhere in exchange for the recognition that Morocco was a French sphere of influence, in agreements with Italy (1902), Spain (1904) and with Britain in the Entente Cordiale of 1904.¹⁷ Following these agreements, in 1905, the French sent a new envoy to Morocco, René Saint-Taillandier who sought to further French influence with the Sultan, proposing reforms and offering French assistance in order to implement them. French influence in Morocco was already strong: by 1905 it had gained certain policing rights along the border with Algeria and informal rights to police two Moroccan ports to protect its trade interests from the internal security problems in Morocco and ostensibly to 'help' the Sultan.¹⁸ France also claimed the greatest financial stake in Morocco of any European power.¹⁹ Through 'diplomatic imperialism' it was well on the way to colonizing the country without destabilizing internal relations between European powers.

¹³ See for example the cases made by Paul W. Schroeder and Matthias Schulz in Afflerbach and Stevenson, *An Improbable War*, p. 32.

¹⁴ On the suppression of the Herero and Nama revolts in German South-West Africa 1904-1907 see Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (New York: 2005), pp. 5-90.

¹⁵ James J. Cooke, *The New French Imperialism 1880-1910. The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion* (Newton Abbot: 1973), p. 109, p. 123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Anderson, *The First Moroccan Crisis*, p. 31, p. 102 and p. 123.

¹⁸ André Tardieu, *La Conférence d'Algésiras* (Paris : 1907), p. 5, pp. 28-29.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 7 February 1906. However, it should be noted that the actual trade statistics for Morocco were unknown and the estimates highly unreliable as the Moroccan government did not keep accurate records or allow the Foreign Consuls in Morocco to do so. Bundesarchiv Berlin, AA R901 bd. 4, Kons-Afrika 5 adh. Jahresberichte des Konsulate Marokko, bd. 2, Nov. 1903 – Nov 1906, 69820 (Microfilm) Abt. I 1869-1906.

In 1905, Germany, too, understood this culture of ‘diplomatic imperialism’ and recognized the importance of the ‘Concert of Europe’ in the colonization process. Indeed, this recognition was fundamental to how it responded to the French attempt to establish a sphere of influence in Morocco. Germany was in a difficult situation – domestic colonial and Pan-German lobby groups were pushing for a more aggressive German foreign policy. This trend was fuelled by a widespread belief in ‘social imperialism’ among Wilhelmine elites – the idea that the acquisition of colonies would create national unity at home, stabilize the authoritarian state system and undermine the ongoing rise of the Social Democratic Party. The 1904 Franco-British *Entente Cordiale* was seen as a diplomatic defeat in Germany, and as an anti-German alliance, even though the agreement was not a military pact and was almost entirely concerned with resolving British and French disputes over colonies. For these reasons, Germany felt under pressure to gain a sphere of influence in North Africa and counter French ambitions in Morocco, an area of commercial interest for German trade.

The difficulty was how to do this within the strictures of the existing system of ‘diplomatic imperialism.’ This system was proving increasingly constraining for Germany which toyed with a number of strategies that it hoped might manipulate it in its favour. One such strategy was to claim that France had no right to instigate reforms in Morocco without consulting all the other European countries with rights there under an earlier Treaty – the Madrid Convention of 1880. This was a direct appeal to the ‘Concert of Europe,’ an attempt to pose as the defender of collective rights against French usurpation.

Another German strategy was to stage dramatic gestures, and dangerously play up the threat of war, in the belief that this would impress upon other European powers the importance of consultation with Germany on imperial issues: the fact that France had not considered it necessary to make a bilateral agreement with Germany over Morocco rankled, especially given Germany was deeply insecure about its newly acquired Great Power status. Hence Germany opted for an increase in belligerent rhetoric and, theatrically, Kaiser Wilhelm II dramatically interrupted a Mediterranean cruise to visit Tangier, where he declared Germany’s support for the Sultan’s independence and the integrity of his kingdom, turning Morocco overnight into an international ‘crisis.’²⁰

The Kaiser’s declaration illustrated the third German strategy which was to promote the idea that the indigenous government of Morocco should have a role within the process of ‘diplomatic imperialism’ – indigenous governments were effectively excluded from the European powers’ bargaining process at this point. Thus Germany planned that it would challenge the French establishment of a sphere of influence in Morocco by posing as the protector of Moroccan independence. This idea was attractive on several levels: first, Germany believed it could control the Moroccan government and that the Moroccan government in turn would be grateful for German support; thus Morocco would become a German sphere of interest. Second, it was hoped that the policy might have wider benefits as it fitted with German attempts to win favour with the Ottoman Empire by presenting itself as the ally of Muslim peoples. Finally, arguing for Moroccan involvement meant that Germany could appeal to the ‘Concert of Europe’ against the French takeover of Morocco in a way that appeared disinterested.

Throughout April and May 1905, there was a strident German press campaign against France with belligerent overtones, escalating the sense of international ‘crisis.’ Meanwhile the German delegate at Tangier usurped the position of the French representative, Saint-Taillandier, and became the prime influence over the Sultan. This German sabre-rattling was effective: the French quickly resorted to the norms of ‘diplomatic imperialism’ to resolve the situation. The French Premier, Rouvier, instigated a secret deal with Germany that the French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé would be removed; on 6 June 1905, Delcassé was forced to resign.²¹ With Delcassé gone, France sought to organize a compensatory accord with Germany, similar to those it had arranged with the other countries that had interests in Morocco.

²⁰ Lamar Cecil, *Wilhelm II* (Chapel Hill: 1989), p. 94.

²¹ E.N. Anderson, *The First Moroccan Crisis, 1904-1906*, p. 230.

At this point Germany had effectively won its objectives. However, it opted to go further and to try to use the system of 'diplomatic imperialism' to humiliate France. Effectively it appealed once again to the 'Concert' of European powers, refusing the French offer of a compensatory Franco-German deal, and insisting upon an international conference that would decide the future of Morocco. In addition, Germany demanded that the conference be convened by the Sultan and that a Moroccan delegation be included in the negotiations. Germany believed that the conference would isolate France and bolster its own position. The French finally agreed to a conference on 8 July 1905 and pre-conference negotiations took place in September as to the programme of reforms to be discussed.²² On 28 September, the programme was agreed and sent to the Sultan. It was decided to hold the conference in Spain due to the anarchic situation in Morocco and because Spain had hosted the 1880 Madrid Convention. Twelve countries were invited to the conference, Morocco included. The conference duly opened in the town of Algeciras on 16 January 1906.

Several interim conclusions can be drawn at this point. First, in 1905 there was a well-established diplomatic system for managing European imperialist aims that could be resorted to in moments of crisis. This was a key reason why war did not break out over Morocco in 1905, despite the real agitation that the crisis unleashed. States could achieve their colonial ambitions through the system of 'diplomatic imperialism' without provoking European armed conflict. This process operated in conjunction with the European balance of power system – not in opposition to it.

Second, Germany was no novice, but an integral player within this system: it could, and did, use it to its advantage. "*Weltpolitik*, in other words, a diplomatic success, not war, was Germany's purpose in 1905," as the historian Hew Strachan has pointed out.²³ However, in 1905, Germany began to adopt increasingly radical measures that challenged the existing norms within the 'diplomatic imperialism' system – such as the theatrical belligerent gesture. This occurred because Germany was becoming increasingly frustrated with the existing diplomatic process for managing imperialism – it sought to gain greater leverage, although still operating within the norms of international conferences and negotiations.²⁴

Imperialism and the Policing Question

In light of the above evidence, it is necessary to reassess the role that imperialism actually played in creating European tensions in 1905-1906, as clearly such tensions could, and often were, successfully circumnavigated. To gauge the actual impact of imperialism, two key questions must be explored. First, how did the actual process of conference negotiation and broader diplomatic system facilitate imperialism, in a way that lessened the likelihood of European war? Second, was this process under strain in 1905-1906 or did it function successfully at Algeciras?

To turn to the first question in detail: the conference of Algeciras presents a fascinating insight into how European states 'managed' the imperial process. The European powers used Algeciras to seriously undermine Moroccan sovereignty by setting up and establishing European control of a Moroccan State Bank and by developing a non-indigenous police force, ostensibly to protect foreign traders. Thus the whole process of imperial takeover of Morocco was cloaked in the respectable language of international diplomacy. This occurred to such an extent that the Moroccan delegation went to the conference believing that the international powers would reduce French influence in Morocco and offer further loans for the Moroccan government's programme of reform.

The reality was very different. The police question in particular offers a clear example of how European states traded off imperial ambitions through negotiation in 1906. Both the British and the Germans made it clear that what was at stake at the conference was nothing less than the colonization

²² Ibid.

²³ Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 16.

²⁴ Ibid.

of Morocco – a process which would begin through assigning a mandate for policing Morocco to a European power or powers. Friedrich von Holstein defined German Moroccan policy as follows:

Germany has no intention of making the settlement of the Moroccan question more difficult by trying to secure special privileges; on the other hand there is no reason to jettison legitimate economic interests, which Germany shares with other civilized nations in Morocco by conceding a general mandate [for policing] to France, that is by sacrificing Morocco to a process of Tunisification.²⁵

The British delegate in turn also understood the conference in terms of the progressive colonization of Morocco stating:

If I were France, I would be quite ready to surrender the police duties to anyone for a limited period provided I had predominant control over the bank and finance matters. I should have far more influence by holding the purse strings than I would have if I were cooped up with a few police in a coast town.²⁶

Thus the police question at the conference was really a question of the international ‘Concert of European Powers’ choosing Morocco’s colonizer: the fact that Germany had insisted upon a delegation from Morocco being present made little difference to this reality. The Kaiser’s championing of Moroccan independence proved to be only a German strategy to win colonial advantages for Germany in Morocco – the Moroccan delegation was left with no conference support. In fact, they were allowed very little influence at the conference at all as their presence was seen as “beneath the dignity of Europe,” according to the leading French delegate Paul Révoil.²⁷ Révoil claimed that this was the view of many of the other delegates because of the Moroccans’ lack of conference skills. This discontent leaked through to the press: the *Times* vociferously complained about the Moroccan delegation’s lack of knowledge, particularly of diplomatic niceties.²⁸ The Moroccan delegates felt themselves “effaced.”²⁹ They told the French that they believed that the Germans “should have been our advocates at Algeciras after the assurances they gave last summer and in reality it is they who now ask Europe to tie our hands and govern us.”³⁰ To the *Times*, the Moroccan delegation explained: “we are not benighted savages. We have much to do before we can compare ourselves with you but we possess a civilization, a legal system and a religion deserving all respect. Why would they not let us speak?”³¹ Thus through the allocation of a policing mandate, the conference allowed those powers interested in Morocco – France, Spain, Germany, and to some extent, Italy – to barter colonization rights among themselves.

The pre-conference diplomatic dealing reveals this process of imperialism through negotiation even more clearly: prior to Algeciras, the French delegate-designate to the conference, Paul Révoil, former *Ministre de France* in Morocco, visited Madrid, to discuss with the French Ambassador to Spain, Jules Cambon, how to deal with Spanish ambitions in Morocco at the conference.³² In Madrid, several French strategies were established for handling the police question. The French believed that the Germans would make their proposals through the Moroccan delegation which they ascertained would oppose any power gaining a sole mandate to police Morocco, proposing instead that it be given to

²⁵ N. Rich and M. H. Fisher eds, *The Holstein Papers*, 4 vols, vol. 4 (Cambridge: 1963), no. 919, Holstein to Bülow, January 1906, p. 380.

²⁶ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley, eds (London: 1927), HMSO, 1926-1938, vol. III, no. 251, Nicolson to Grey, 21 January 1906.

²⁷ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part 2, Paul Révoil, Journal, p. 878.

²⁸ *Times*, 21 and 29 January 1906.

²⁹ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part 2, Paul Révoil, Journal, p. 888.

³⁰ *Ibid.* See also no. 363, enclosure no. 1, report by M. Gaillard, 24 February 1906.

³¹ *Times*, 31 January 1906.

³² René G. Saint-Taillandier, *Les Origines du Maroc Français : Récit d'une Mission* (Paris : Plon, 1930), p. I.

several smaller powers.³³ To counter this, Jules Cambon recommended that France should not attempt to obtain a sole police mandate but would propose a shared Franco-Spanish one.³⁴ Spain had already contracted a Moroccan treaty with France and France had acknowledged Spanish rights in Morocco in the 1904 Entente.³⁵ To aid the French, the British delegate-designate to the Algeiras conference, Sir Arthur Nicolson and Basil von Bacheracht, the second Russian delegate-designate, concluded that the police question should be dealt with “entirely and solely as a matter affecting the security and safety of foreigners, whom the Moorish authorities were unable to protect.”³⁶ Thus the process of dismantling Moroccan sovereignty and turning the state into a European colony occurred through negotiation – negotiations which utilized the existing structures of international European politics.

This was a fully conscious process whereby European states attending the conference of Algeiras facilitated the French colonization of Morocco – America was the only state that rejected the idea of dividing Morocco into spheres of influence.³⁷ The British in particular, following the Entente Cordiale, were very supportive of the French – their delegate Nicolson emphasizing that “all considerations of a political character and all reference to ‘special interests’ etc. should not be touched upon in discussion” in order to promote the French conference strategy of underlining France’s pragmatic credentials for policing Morocco.³⁸ This emphasis on the practical side of the police problem would favour a Franco-Spanish mandate as these two powers alone claimed possession of the resources necessary to organize the police, such as colonial experience, geographical proximity and access to Muslim troops.³⁹

Thus negotiation of the police question illustrates how tensions were carefully channelled within a diplomatic culture that allowed for imperial dispute to be overcome. However, we must now turn to the second question: do events at the conference of Algeiras reveal that this system of ‘diplomatic imperialism’ was under strain? Central to this question is the role of Germany in negotiating the police question at the conference.

The difficulty at Algeiras was *not* Germany’s imperial aims – or even the fact that these caused international tension – the international system was designed to deal with this through diplomatic concessions, compensatory deals and bargaining. The problem that emerged was Germany’s actual *practice* of diplomacy at the conference itself where it made a series of basic judgment errors in negotiating, largely due to incompetence. However, even this difficulty, of shoddy German negotiating blunders, did not ultimately prove insurmountable; although it strained tempers at the conference, it did not actually threaten the existing European system of managing imperialism through diplomacy.

The German position at the conference was that it wanted to preserve the ‘Open Door’ concept in Morocco which would allow it continued access to the Moroccan economy, with a view to later colonial gains. Overall, however, in terms of the final resolution of the police question at the conference, Germany failed to exploit certain moments of advantage, making a number of basic judgment errors – its practice of conference diplomacy was very poor at Algeiras. First, it initially refused to reveal its exact negotiating position on the police question which alienated the French and the other powers. Second, the Germans overestimated the likelihood that they could win Russian support for their position, believing that Russia, weakened by the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 revolution, would retreat from world affairs, whereas in reality Russia wished to pursue an active role

³³ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. viii, no. 323, Jules Cambon to Rouvier, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, 4.1.1906.

³⁴ This had already been mooted as a possibility in the French Foreign Office during the pre-conference negotiations, according to Norman Rich: Norman Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein, Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II* (Cambridge: 1965) p. 735.

³⁵ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley, eds, (London: 1927), HMSO, 1926-1938, vol II, no. 417, Text of the Entente Cordiale, Article VIII.

³⁶ Bacheracht had previously been the Russian representative in Morocco. *The Times*, 6.3.1906.

³⁷ Anderson, *The First Moroccan Crisis*, pp. 384-385.

³⁸ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. III, no. 224, Nicolson to Grey, Madrid, 2.1.1906.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

at Algeciras to regain lost prestige.⁴⁰ Germany also expected Russia to show gratitude for the assistance Germany had given it during the Russo-Japanese war.⁴¹ In reality, the Russian delegate to the conference, Count Cassini was keen to encourage Franco-Russian rapprochement.⁴² Third, the German delegation could have used increasing Spanish dissatisfaction to greater effect to break the Franco-Spanish consensus on Morocco but failed to realize this. During the opening phase of the conference the Spanish had attempted to win greater concessions from France in Morocco by implying that Germany knew the secret terms of the Franco-Spanish Treaty.⁴³ The Franco-Spanish Treaty only dealt with French policing rights in the ports that would fall under the Spanish sphere of influence and the French feared that the Germans would offer Spain a separate deal on the other Moroccan ports, winning Spanish support. Germany failed to pursue this approach which could have proved successful – instead of winning Spain from France with concessions, it criticized the Spanish stance as pro-French.⁴⁴

Finally, and most significantly, there was increasing confusion between Berlin and the German delegation at Algeciras. Berlin hoped for American support which meant that they ignored French private overtures aimed at a deal on the police whereby Germany could have obtained economic concessions in exchange for accepting the French proposal of a dual Franco-Spanish mandate; this Berlin obduracy greatly frustrated the German delegation on the ground at the conference.

The German delegation was hampered by the fact that, inspired by President Roosevelt's support of the open door policy in China and his friendly relations with the Kaiser the previous year, Bülow had sent three German police proposals to Washington hoping that America would adopt one of them as its preferred solution.⁴⁵ These three proposals were: that multiple powers would organize the police in several districts each with a port on the Atlantic; that a small power such as Holland or Switzerland would be entrusted with the whole of police organization; or that the Sultan would organize the police with the aid of volunteer officers – a move that would favour German colonization as the belief was that Germany would be able to influence the Sultan to appoint Germans to these posts. Bülow insisted to the German delegate Joseph Maria von Radowitz that the idea of accepting economic concessions from the French in exchange for Germany accepting the Franco-Spanish police mandate was not acceptable – Bülow believed that if the US intervened on the German side in the police question Germany could obtain her aims without making any concessions in exchange.⁴⁶

It was a disastrous policy. For the German delegation at the conference it was clear that none of Bülow's proposals stood a realistic chance of success: at a meeting on 3 February between the leading German delegate, Radowitz, and the French representative Révoil, the French utterly rejected the idea of the Sultan having any control of the police.⁴⁷ The French insisted that only a Franco-Spanish mandate was acceptable. The American delegate Henry White and the Italian delegate Visconti Venosta both informed the German delegation that they supported the Franco-Spanish mandate.⁴⁸ The German delegation was aware that Berlin favoured Bülow's third proposal – but they also knew that the American delegate had informed his government that it was “unworkable and impracticable.”⁴⁹ The German delegation tried without success to change Bülow's policy; Radowitz informed Berlin: “We can only repeat and urgently advise that the possibility of a solution involving French and

⁴⁰ *The Holstein Papers*, vol. iv, no. 919, January 1906, Holstein to Bülow, p. 380.

⁴¹ Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, p. 688.

⁴² *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part ii, Paul Révoil Journal, p. 880.

⁴³ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part i, no. 38, Jules Cambon to Rouvier, 23.1.1906.

⁴⁴ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part i, no. 59, Jules Cambon to Rouvier, 26.1.1906. The French were sufficiently alarmed to consider revising the Franco-Spanish Treaty to include all the Moroccan ports.

⁴⁵ *Die Grösse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, vol. xxi, part I, no. 6965, Bülow to Radowitz, 26 January 1906 and vol. xx, part ii, no. 6744, Bülow to Sternberg, 27 June 1906.

⁴⁶ *Die Grösse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, vol. xxi, part i, no. 6973, Bülow to Radowitz, 30 January 1906.

⁴⁷ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part ii, Paul Révoil, Journal, p. 882.

⁴⁸ *Die Grösse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, vol. xxi, part i, no. 6984, Radowitz to the German Foreign Office, 5.2.1906; *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part ii, Paul Révoil, Journal, p. 887.

⁴⁹ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. III, no. 275, Nicolson to Grey, 11.2.1906.

Spanish officers with guarantees for the sovereignty of the Sultan and equality for all be considered.”⁵⁰ The German delegation also informed the French secretly that they favoured compromise but that Berlin would “not permit them to make any concession.”⁵¹ The unrealistic nature of Bülow’s policy alienated the other powers present at the conference who generally perceived the idea of the Sultan having control of the police as unacceptable.

Bülow’s adamant position was in part due to interference by the Kaiser. Holstein in a letter on 7 February remarked that “it is difficult for us to negotiate *for this reason*: because H.M., with all his desire for peace, is holding fast to his well-known position of 31 March. He would take it very much amiss if we ‘sold the Sultan out to France.’”⁵² The Kaiser himself wrote that if the Spanish King did not “inform me about the agreement with France over Morocco, and if Spain – by supporting France helps to jettison the Conference, then I will not pay a visit to Madrid this year! I am so much older than that lout that he at least owes me that!”⁵³ The result of this crass interference was stalemate – which aggravated the other European powers and led some to fear that the conference might even break down.⁵⁴

Ultimately, Germany was forced to compromise on the police question and presented a proposal through the Austro-Hungarian delegation that the Sultan would control the police, but would appoint French and Spanish instructing officers in seven of the eight main Moroccan ports; the eighth port, Casablanca, was to be policed by another minor European power. An inspector from a minor power would also inspect police at all the other ports. The French stalled for time, refusing to concede the right to police Casablanca to a minor power and on 12 March, Bülow panicked and overruled Foreign Office advisors, instructing the German delegation to give way on the Casablanca issue.⁵⁵ This was yet another strategic blunder by Bülow as by this point, the other powers had accepted the Austro-Hungarian proposal and supported the German position on Casablanca. The mood was that Germany had made concessions and now France should do likewise; the French were actually considering ceding when, on 26 March, Germany withdrew her demand that a neutral police force be appointed at Casablanca.⁵⁶ Berlin had no desire to pursue the police question any further and Germany yielded on this point in return for concessions on who controlled the Moroccan state bank.⁵⁷

Thus in the final conference agreement on policing, French and Spanish police were provided for in eight Moroccan ports with a weak inspectorate from a minor European power at Tangier. This ultimate compromise was scarcely dramatic – France had entered the conference with policing rights already established in three Moroccan ports and left with sole rights in four, hardly an enormous gain. The conference had also negotiated key roles for a number of countries in the Moroccan state bank – it would not be entirely under French influence. The final result of the conference – the Act of Algeciras – was communicated to the Sultan for approval and signed on 7 April 1906. The Moroccans had been presented with a *fait accompli* that allowed European states to effectively proceed with the usurpation of Moroccan sovereignty.

Thus, in many respects, the policing question at the Algeciras conference reveals a very straightforward process of horse-trading among the Great Powers – a system of ‘diplomatic imperialism’ that was relatively robust and able to withstand the sabre-rattling radicalization of Germany’s *Weltpolitik* Foreign Policy that had unleashed the First Moroccan Crisis the previous year.

⁵⁰ *Die Grösse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, vol. xxi, part i, no. 6990, Radowitz to the German Foreign Office, 9.2.1906.

⁵¹ *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part ii, no. 359, Révoil to Rouvier, 5.3.1906.

⁵² *The Holstein Papers*, vol. iv, no. 931, Holstein to Radolin, 7.2.06.

⁵³ *The Holstein Papers*, vol. iv, no. 933, Kaiser Wilhelm to von Bülow, 11.2.1906.

⁵⁴ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. III, no. 288, Grey to Nicolson, 15.2.1906.

⁵⁵ *The Holstein Papers*, vol. iv, no. 948, Memorandum by Holstein, 29.3.1906.

⁵⁶ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. III, no. 338, Nicolson to Grey, 10.3.1906; *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. ix, part ii, Paul Révoil, Journal, pp. 947-948.

⁵⁷ *The Holstein Papers*, vol iv, no. 946, Bülow to Holstein, 25.3.1906.

The Algeciras conference successfully resolved the crisis without war, while also facilitating the smooth advance of the colonization of Morocco. In terms of the advance of imperialism, the conference was a success: Europe's crisis resolution system for easing imperial tensions had worked yet again.

However, at a deeper level, the conference hinted at longer-term changes that posed an increasing challenge to the continued functioning of this diplomatic system. The first was the alliance system. At Algeciras, the French, British and Russians shared information and acted to advance each other's goals; the Austro-Hungarians, in turn, supported Germany. To what extent this increasingly rigid European alliance structure was compatible with the existing *modus operandi* of diplomatic imperialism remains to be explored through further research; what is clear is that it had changed the room for manoeuvre. Thus at the conference of Algeciras we can see how diplomatic changes *within* Europe led to tensions within the European system for managing imperialism, rather than the other way around.

Second, the conference revealed an alarming lack of German diplomatic skill. Germany's blunders at Algeciras were largely due to incompetence but they alarmed the other powers and they highlighted that Germany's attempt in 1905-1906 to reform the existing norms of the 'diplomatic imperialism' system from within – in order to accelerate the process of imperialism in Germany's favour – was extremely unwise. Germany lacked the procedural ability in diplomatic practice at this point to successfully carry this policy through. There can be little doubt that a more skillful approach to the police question, accepting French economic concessions in exchange for yielding earlier on French and Spanish control of the police, could have gained Germany more imperial advantages.

Ultimately, this was why Algeciras was portrayed as a German defeat in the international press, even though the results of the conference itself were relatively modest and did not particularly damage German interests in Morocco itself. It was the revelation that other states had not automatically supported Germany at the conference that caused alarm in the German press. Internationally, too, the idea of conference politics was looking increasingly elite and remote in an age of mass national political mobilization – there was press frustration at the length of time that the Algeciras negotiations were taking.⁵⁸ In Germany, colonial lobby groups wanted rapid results: the existing complexities of the European system of diplomatic imperialism frustrated them. This may help to explain the more forceful German reaction during the Second Moroccan Crisis in 1911.

Conclusion – the legacy for 1914

There are several key conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis of the conference of Algeciras. The first is that imperialism, in itself, did not necessarily inevitably ensure war in Europe. Crisis management processes were effective; there was a system for dealing with imperial tensions and this system worked. Algeciras illustrates this process extremely clearly and it thus forces us to reassess the idea that imperialism in itself seriously undermined the European 'Concert of Powers.' In reality, the 'concert' interacted quite successfully with the European imperialist drive: the 1906 conference revealed how complex, and indeed robust, the system of negotiated imperialism actually was. In 1906, the great powers proved perfectly capable of negotiating a potential imperial clash without recourse to war, despite strong economic competition in Morocco. There has been much debate about the nature of the imperial world order and its relation to violence; no less a personage than Lenin hypothesized that imperial rivalries would lead to war between the Great Powers in the colonies.⁵⁹ In fact, at Algeciras, an alliance between the two main colonial competitors in Morocco, France and Spain, was consolidated. Colonial competition thus did not inevitably create long-term tensions, such as those seen between France and Germany or lead to war: as long as a system of 'diplomatic imperialism' – obtaining territories through a sophisticated process of diplomatic bargaining – operated, imperial

⁵⁸ GStA, I, Nachlass Radowitz, D.J. 15b, CNr 2 Bd. 2, Radowitz's press cuttings, no. 187 and 188.

⁵⁹ V.I. Lenin, *L'impérialisme stade suprême du capitalisme* (Pantin: [1917] 2001).

tensions could be successfully surmounted. It was only when this system failed catastrophically that problems arose. And, overall, this international system showed itself relatively sound at Algeciras in 1906.

However, if the workings of the international system, with its mediation structures established to channel grievances into diplomacy, functioned effectively in 1906, they were facing new challenges. Algeciras revealed that there was the potential for tension between the rapidly evolving alliance system in Europe and the existing system of diplomatic imperialism – the concert system for channeling imperialism could only work if the Great Powers were free to wheel and deal in the national self-interest and were not uniformly and permanently divided into two opposing alliance camps. However, this clash was not rigid at this point: Russia and Italy in particular acted out of opportunism rather than any fixed alliance. But the sharing of conference information between the British and French delegations was significant. This did not amount to German isolation in 1906; however, it did highlight that the evolving web of alliances had an increasing potential to hamper more traditional pragmatic bargaining over imperial acquisitions and that Germany was peculiarly concerned about this process, in comparison to other powers. A particularly marked German fear of isolation, a sensitivity which was more acute than that of the other participants, was also evident in Germany's flawed idea that it could break the Entente between Britain and France at Algeciras. This policy led to confusion between Germany's imperial agenda for Morocco and its policy towards internal European alliances – a confusion which its delegation never resolved.

It was these German concerns and the changes in German imperial policy that stemmed from them, that marked the most significant challenge to the international system to emerge at Algeciras. Although Germany went into the conference an integral part of the European Great Power framework, carrying out colonization through international bartering in the same way as the other states, its increasing tendency in 1905-6 to threaten war in Europe over colonial acquisition differed from its peers. At Algeciras, Germany began to break away from the agreed European strategy of diplomatic coordination of imperialism, largely in frustration at its inability to make the system work to rapidly create German colonies, in the way that Bismarck once had. In reality, this inability to play the system was due in a large part to a disastrous loss of German diplomatic competence at the Algeciras conference. However, Germany did not see the outcome in these terms, blaming the other powers for conspiring against it. Thus the problem that emerged in 1905-1906 was not Germany's imperial aims in themselves – these could have been facilitated through the diplomatic system and, indeed, Germany recognized this by calling for a conference in the first place – it was rather that Germany appeared unable to understand how to use international negotiation to consolidate its imperial policies and increasingly inclined to paranoid judgments rather than accurate analysis of the diplomatic realities. What led to this particularly incompetent performance remains unclear - this must be the subject of future research. But the increased role of the Kaiser, leading to disunity and confusion within the German delegation regarding Germany's actual policy, was probably one factor; Berlin's surprising refusal to heed the advice of its professional diplomats at the conference was another. Regardless of the causes, however, the outcome was that Germany increasingly rejected the system of 'diplomatic imperialism' after Algeciras. Thus it is no exaggeration to suggest that the conference of 1906 was a significant turning-point in German imperial policy before the war: the new incompetence it revealed, coupled with the inability to channel German imperial aims through the system of international diplomacy, marked a key shift in the *political* practice of German imperialism that occurred at the same time as the shift in German military practice seen in the Herero and Nama wars of the same period. Therefore, although the overall international system was relatively strong in 1906, problematic trends had begun to emerge.

This German incompetence at Algeciras left a significant legacy. Germany mistakenly attributed failure at the conference to other European states deliberately isolating it. In reality, its own diplomatic blunders were to blame and, even then, when looked at objectively, the outcome at Algeciras scarcely amounted to a major, or insurmountable, international 'isolation' of Germany. This was an argument made in hindsight – particularly after the First World War as European states sought to trace back causes for war into the prewar period. In fact, France was prepared to negotiate concessions with

Germany throughout the conference and the other powers accepted a final compromise that was not that different to the status quo at the beginning of negotiations, nor even particularly detrimental to German trading rights in Morocco. The German perception of Algeciras, however, was heavily coloured by the promotion of a negative view of the conference in the German nationalist press which undermined the image of the existing international diplomatic system. Bülow's attempt to distract attention from his own policy shortcomings regarding the conference, by over-emphasizing the international isolation of Germany driven by France, did not help. This image of Algeciras had consequences in July 1914 - making it less likely that crisis conference resolution would be considered. The German memory of Algeciras associated international conferences with diplomatic humiliation.

This memory ultimately may provide us with a final clue as to why the existing system of European diplomatic crisis resolution, which was relatively robust in 1906, shattered so suddenly in July 1914. Of course, the crisis in July 1914 concerned European states, Serbia and Austro-Hungary, not overseas colonial acquisitions. This raised the stakes considerably. However, the option of negotiation failed dramatically in July 1914 – with Germany and Austro-Hungary swiftly pushing for war and unwilling to consider international conference mediation. Under this pressure, the crisis resolution system collapsed, marking a clear break with prewar norms. As David Stevenson and Holger Afflerbach have argued:

World War I marked an abrupt departure from previous trends in European political culture, not their continuation or automatic outcome. Historians who declare, after the event, that World War I (or any other war) was inevitable, and build into any prehistory of a war the path of inevitability, repeat the same mistake, which was called already in 1914 a “monstrous proposition,” over and over again. If this train of thought is persuasive, important revisions of received accounts are needed to present prewar developments more accurately and to nuance the impression of ever intensifying European great-power antagonisms.⁶⁰

Revisiting the Conference of Algeciras must be part of this reassessment.

Heather Jones
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⁶⁰ Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson, “An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture Before 1914” in Afflerbach and Stevenson eds, *An Improbable War*, p. 10.

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