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Study Guide

Special Political and Decolonization Committee

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COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

The fourth committee of the United Nations, Special Decolonization and Political Committee (SPECPOL) was established in 1993 as a merged committee of the Decolonization and the Political Committees. Its main goal is to deal with a diverse set of political issues, including UN peacekeeping and peaceful uses of outer space, the effects of atomic radiation, questions relating to information, a comprehensive review of the question of peacekeeping operations and review of special political missions. Since its establishment it has done important steps for the world, such as decreasing the number of people living in colonies from 750 to 2 million.

First Topic: Addressing the changing dynamics of Kurdistan

Alžběta Schejbalová

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Kurdistan Region (KR): A semi-autonomous region located in northern Iraq with its own government and political parties. It is the only region recognised by Iraq or other nations related to Kurdistan. Officially established in 2005, but has existed since approximately 1975.

Peshmerga: “Those who face death”, the official military forces of the Kurdistan Region. It includes men and women and was established in the middle of the 20th century.

ISIL/ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant / Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (or Daesh) is an Islamic terrorist organization established in the early 2000's, but widely known since 2014 when it seized a large part of northern Iraq and Syria. It aims to establish an Islamic state following the strict version of Sharia law. This group is responsible for extreme violence, including massacres, ethnic cleansing, and human rights abuses, not only in the Middle East, but around the world. ISIS lost a lot of control in 2019 but continues to spread its aim and terrorism worldwide.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG): The official executive body of the Kurdistan Region, which holds the most of the power over the “nation”. Therefore, the words KRG and the Kurdistan Region are sometimes being swapped in articles or documents.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK): An influential socialist and social democratic political party in the Kurdistan Region describing its goals as human rights, self-determination and democracy for the Kurdish people. One of the main political parties in this region

CURRENT OVERVIEW AND HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

Kurdistan is a broadly defined geographic, mountainous region allocated in the west Asia, spread over large parts northern Iraq, western Iran, eastern Turkey and smaller parts of Syria and Armenia. Kurds, the main inhabitants of Kurdistan are believed to descend from the ancient Median Empire around 7th century BCE as a separate ethnic group (however, not confirmed). The region of Kurdistan has been facing resiliency and repression since its early origins as well as being influenced by various of empires, such as Persians, Greeks and Romans. Fortunately, Kurdistan is allocated within large mountain ranges, mainly the Zagros (Iran) and Taurus (Turkey) mountains, but also the Ararat Mountain (Turkey/Armenia). These mountains have made the area protected and caused Kurds to survive through centuries of wars and international conflicts as a distinct ethnic group.



Kurds had felt the first hope for independence after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, when the USA president W. Wilson, in the Fourteen Points declaration stated that “The non-Turkish nationalities of the Ottoman Empire should be assured of an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development”, which was unfortunately never applied. Another hope came with the Treaty of Sèvres, signed two years later, providing recognition of particular Arab states including Kurdistan,

which the Kurds of a province Mosul (in northern Iraq) had the right to join. This treaty was never ratified but was superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne, which didn't mention Kurdistan anymore and Mosul was awarded to Iraq.

From the end of World War I to the Gulf War in 1990, the Kurds fought to achieve autonomy, however, all the campaigns were forcibly put down and they suffered greater repression each time. What led to a certain level of self-governance was the establishment of Iraq's autonomous region – "Kurdistan Region" in 2005. In 1992 the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a new government of the Kurdistan Region was established, but after two years, started a civil war against another political party, the Union of Kurdistan (PUK) since their power-sharing arrangement in Kurdistan collapsed. This conflict lasted until 1998 and to two separate administrations.

During the 2010s, the weakened state of Iraq and the Syrian Civil War left both countries unable to prevent the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in areas near Kurdistan. Kurdish fighters emerged as a leading force in combating ISIS in both Iraq and Syria. Through their efforts, Kurdish forces gained control over significant territory and strategic resources, while also earning considerable international support and recognition for their role in the fight. ISIS now controls a large piece of land straddling the Iraq and Syrian borders and attacks Kurdish cities in both Syria and Iraq against the Peshmerga actively fighting and defending cities which were previously under the control of the Kurds.

Today, Kurdistan is a territory dependent on its neighbours, fighting for independence for centuries. Kurdistan's main economic resource is oil, which is very valuable not only for Kurdistan but for all the countries in the Middle East and in the whole world.

Knowing the History of Kurdistan, we can assume that the potential for escalated conflicts is extremely high. In order to remain independent

ethnicity and potentially become an independent state, it must prove its strength and fight against the threats given by its neighbour states.

Timeline of the topic

Iranian Kurds establish the state of Mahabad (January 1946)

After World War II, Kurds living in the Iranian part of Kurdistan established a short-lived state of Mahabad, which got under soviet control shortly after. After the end of soviet occupation of the Middle East, Mahabad got under Iran's control again.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is founded (1974)

Abdullah Ocalan founds the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) with an aim to establish an independent Kurdistan in the southeast of Turkey. This organization had started severe conflicts between Kurdistan and Turkey in the 1980's and uses violence including terrorist attacks – with that being considered as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the USA and the EU.

Iran – Iraq War (1980 – 1988)

This war conflict between Iran and Iraq was initiated by Saddam Hussein, leader of Iraq invaded Iran with the aim to gain control over a region rich in oil and the Gulf. In the war, chemical weapons and trench warfare were included. It also involved a deep historical tension and difference in ideology. The war ended with a cease-fire after an UNSC Resolution. Kurds were actively involved in this war fighting mainly on the Iraq's side, despite the fact that Kurdistan's political parties hadn't shared the same opinion on the conflict.

Iraqi Kurds civil war (1994 – 1998)

This conflict escalated when the two major political parties, KRG and PUK with opposite opinions started a civil war, killing over 2,000 Kurds. Both sides signed the Washington Peace Agreement in 1998, and the conflict resulted into two separate administrations.

Kurdish rebellion and Iran's revolution (August 1979)

Hoping to achieve greater autonomy under the rule of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Kurds were initially supportive of the January 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, but they were rebelling against the new regime. Khomeini declared a holy war against the Kurds, a military campaign to exert control over Kurdish regions resulting in hundreds of deaths and systematic arrests.

Gulf War and the No-fly zone (1990 – 1991)

The Gulf war was a conflict between Iraq (Saddam Hussein) and a 42 – country coalition led by the USA. It started by Iraq claiming Kuwait as its territory because of Kuwait's oil supply and Iraq's weakness after the Iran-Iraq War. The coalition united to expel Iraq's forces from Kuwait and also protect rich-in-oil Saudi Arabia. This conflict led to a lot of tension in the region. After the war, a no-fly zone was established in Iraq in order to protect Kurds and Shiite from Hussein. This zone prohibited Iraq's aircrafts from flying in the northern and southern Iraq. This zone lasted until 2003 with the USA invasion to Iraq.

USA invasion to Iraq (March 2003)

USA military forces invaded Iraq toppling the president Saddam Hussein. When Kurds drafted a new Iraqi constitution recognizing the autonomy of Kurdistan Region and KRG in the new federal system. After the invasion, the first ever Kurdish president Celal Talabani was named and Kurds participated in the 2005 elections – leading to the semi-autonomy of the Kurdistan Region.

Kurdistan Region in Iraq gaining semi-autonomy (1975 - 2005)

After the Iran-Iraq War, the autonomy of Kurdistan had started to be more discussed, which strongly increased with the no-fly zone in Iraq. Later in 2005, Kurdistan Region got officially recognized by Iraq's government. Since then, Kurdistan Region gained a lot of autonomy, however, relations with the Iraq's government have been tense, mainly because of Kurdistan's oil supply and territorial disputes.

Kurds declare autonomy in Syria (November 2013)

In the middle of Syria's civil war, Kurds declare three autonomous cantons in northern Syria called Rojava or The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). This region has never been recognized by Syria or other nations.

ISIS attacking northern Iraq (2014 – 2017)

In June 2014, ISIS attacked northern Iraq, quickly occupied Mosul and proceeded towards the Kurdistan Region with the intention to destabilize this area. KRG mobilized Peshmerga in order to protect the territory and civilians. A month later, the USA, France, UK, Canada and Australia began airstrikes to support Kurds and their forces. Iran and Turkey also played a crucial role in this conflict, providing military and humanitarian help. This international support led to the defeat of ISIS, however, the region's security and military and humanitarian situation was affected and ISIS is still starting conflicts and attack to this day.

PAST ACTIONS

The first act for democracy happened with the establishment of Republic of Mahabad, in 1946, which did not succeed as this region got under different nations' control shortly after its foundation. When PKK and later KGR were founded, Kurds got the hope for independence and self-government which, however, later escalated into civil war instead. As time went by, Kurds had taken part in several international and civil war conflicts (1974 Islamic revolution, ISIS rise), which unfortunately hadn't brought them semi neither full autonomy. After 1975 when the Kurdistan Region was slowly starting to form, Kurds have partly gained at least semi-autonomy. Later, when Rojava was declared, Kurdistan took another small step towards independence. However, none of the past actions led to a distinct change and Kurdistan still remains a very problematic region being a topic of a lot of international conflicts. With Kurds having a long ethnic history and strong military basis, they are prepared to fight for their territory.

COUNTRY POSITIONS

Islamic Republic of Iran: Iran strictly opposes the idea of independent state of Kurdistan as well the Kurdistan Region, since Iranian government believes in a potential threat of destabilization Iran's part of Kurdistan, which could lead to conflicts and possibly a revolution. They are, however remaining diplomatic relations with Kurdistan Region on Iraq in order to maintain stability in the Middle East.

Republic of Iraq: Iraq is the only nation recognizing the Kurdistan Region as at least semi-autonomous. Iraq's government maintains diplomatic relations with Kurdistan Region, although the situation remains unstable, since Kurdistan Region dispose with oilfields and has a high territorial value.

Republic of Türkiye: Turkey's government disclaims any independence of Turkish Kurdistan region. Moreover, Turkey's primary concern is the PKK and lack of stability within the whole Kurdistan. Turkey has had tense relations with Kurds in general, however remains involved in trading and diplomatic cooperation with Kurdistan. In May 2012, both parties agreed to build three pipelines to bring oil and gas from the Kurdistan Region to Turkey, along with the trade rate between the two regions being increased by 900% since 2002.

Syrian Arab Republic: Syria and Kurdistan have been cooperating occasionally, mainly on the topic of ISIS, however, since the Syrian Civil War, Kurds have been fighting for autonomous region, what is Syria trying to prevent. The region of Rojava has never been recognized by Syrian government and Syrian Kurdistan remains non-independent.

Republic of Armenia: Relations are described as 'cordial' and an Armenian consulate in Erbil (capital city of the Kurdistan Region) is to be opened soon, however, no autonomous region for Kurds has been established yet.

United States of America: USA has fostered its relationships with Kurdistan through military assistance and humanitarian support in order to make the region more secure. Moreover, The USA had helped Peshmerga to defeat ISIS in 2017 and USA announced further support for Peshmerga for anti-ISIS operations.

Russian Federation: Russia has been supporting Kurdistan Region since the end of Cold War, however, this relationship may have a lot of intentions. Russia gains opportunities such as undermining USA's interests in Syria and Iraq and having an ally in the Middle East (which could also be very profitable with its oilfields). Russian government has been sympathetic to the Kurds independent movement as well as supporting them military.

United Kingdom: United Kingdom supports the Kurdistan Region and had discussed serious world issues with its government in 2023. UK has a overall strong and vibrant relationship with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq spanning a wide range of areas.

Fifth French Republic: The Fifth French Republic has had strong connections with Kurds since the No-fly zone era, for which the president's wife was strongly fighting. Moreover, France is supporting Kurdistan mainly by military. They had sent soldiers to help Peshmerga with training, an undisclosed amount of weapons as well as humanitarian aid. Both nations have described their relations as "historical" and "long term".

People's Republic of China: The relationship between PRC and the Kurdistan Region has been evolving in the recent years. With the growing influence of China in the Middle East, but also economic interests and geopolitical shift, Chinese companies has been securing contracts in variety of sectors and being interested in the Kurdistan Region's oil supplies.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION SHOULD ANSWER

- What steps should the UN take to ensure higher security in Kurdistan? How could these steps be supported with international organizations, such as the WHO and non-profitable organizations, such as Harikan NGO?
- What can the UN do to define Kurdistan's borders more specifically? How can the UN prevent long – lasting territory conflicts?
- Can the UN take important steps to establish an officially recognized state of Kurdistan? If not, how can the UN provide territorial stability for Kurds?
- What can the high-income nations do to support Kurdistan?
- How can international treaties and international laws be revitalized in order to solve this issue properly?
- How can the UN ensure to protect ethnic heritage and history of Kurdistan as well as the nations' on whose territories it lies?

CONCLUSION

Kurdistan is a territory in the Middle East which belongs to five different nations, is rich in oil, which makes it very lucrative and has one important goal – become independent. The situation in Kurdistan is very comprehensive, complex topic and sensitive issue for people living in this part of the world. When knowing this, we should take careful and elaborated steps in order to provide safe space for Kurds as well as respecting their history and ethnicity. Kurdistan has been a place of countless war and civil conflicts which have to come to an end. Nations on whose territories Kurdistan lies should cooperate and come up with an applicable solution together, moreover also ask for and accept help from other UN member nations.

APPENDIX

My main source of information which can help the delegates understand the topic better:

- <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-history/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kurdistan>
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Second topic: Ensuring Stability in Countries with Valuable Commodities

Tobiáš Ryba

Topic Introduction

The chairs of this committee, representing the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL), seek to address the pressing issue of ensuring stability in countries rich in valuable commodities. SPECPOL, as the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, deals with a wide range of political issues including decolonization, peacekeeping, and the rights of peoples to self-determination. One of its key responsibilities is to address challenges that affect international peace and security, particularly in regions where political instability can have global repercussions.

Countries endowed with valuable natural resources such as oil, diamonds, gold, and rare earth minerals often face unique challenges. While these commodities have the potential to drive economic growth and development, they can also lead to conflict, corruption, and social unrest if not managed properly. The phenomenon known as the "resource curse" highlights how resource-rich countries can experience slower economic growth and development compared to their resource-poor counterparts. SPECPOL aims to explore solutions to ensure that these valuable commodities contribute to stability and prosperity rather than conflict and instability.

Key Terms

Valuable Commodities: Natural resources of high economic value, such as oil, natural gas, diamonds, gold, and rare earth minerals extracted from the earth.

Resource Curse: A paradox where countries with an abundance of natural resources tend to have less economic growth, less democracy, and worse development outcomes than countries with fewer natural resources.

Dutch Disease: An economic phenomenon where the rapid development of one sector (like natural resources) leads to a decline in other sectors (like manufacturing or agriculture) due to currency appreciation and resource allocation.

Rentier State: A state that derives a substantial portion of its national revenues from renting indigenous resources to external clients.

Governance: The processes and structures through which decisions are made and authority in a country is exercised, including the management of resources and regulation.

Transparency: Openness and accountability in government and business practices, especially regarding revenues from natural resources.

Extractive Industries: Industries involved in the extraction of natural resources from the earth, including mining, oil, and gas drilling.

Conflict Minerals: Natural resources extracted in a conflict zone and sold to perpetuate fighting, often associated with human rights abuses.

Natural Resource Management: The sustainable utilization of major natural resources, such as land, water, air, minerals, forests, fisheries, and wildlife.

Sustainable Development: Economic development conducted without depletion of natural resources, ensuring that future generations can meet their needs.

Overview Of The Topic

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Governance Challenges: Weak institutions and lack of transparency can lead to mismanagement of resource revenues. Corruption becomes prevalent when large sums of money from resource exports flow into government coffers without adequate oversight. This can result in unequal wealth distribution, fueling social unrest and undermining public trust in government.

Economic Vulnerability: Reliance on a single commodity makes economies vulnerable to market fluctuations. The "Dutch Disease" illustrates how an overemphasis on resource exports can lead to currency appreciation, making other sectors like agriculture and manufacturing less competitive, and hindering economic diversification.

Resource-Driven Conflicts: Control over valuable commodities can become a source of conflict. In regions where governance is weak, resources can fund armed groups and prolong violence. The term "conflict minerals" describes resources that finance conflict, notably in parts of Africa where diamonds and minerals have fueled wars.

Environmental Degradation: Extractive industries often lead to pollution, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity, with long-term impacts on the health and livelihoods of local communities.

Case Studies:

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Rich in minerals like cobalt and diamonds, the DRC has experienced prolonged conflict fueled by competition over resources, involving government forces, rebel groups, and foreign interests.

Venezuela: Possessing some of the world's largest oil reserves, Venezuela has faced economic collapse and political turmoil due to mismanagement of oil revenues, corruption, and overreliance on oil exports.

Nigeria: Africa's largest oil producer has struggled with corruption, militant activities in the Niger Delta, and environmental damage from oil spills, impacting local communities.

SPECPOL's role in addressing these issues is crucial. The committee can facilitate international cooperation to promote good governance, transparency, and sustainable practices in resource management. By addressing the underlying causes of instability in resource-rich countries, SPECPOL can contribute to peace, security, and development in these regions.

Timeline of the topic

1950s-1960s: Decolonization led to independence for many African, Asian, and Latin American countries, bringing control over natural resources but also challenges in governance and development.

1960: Formation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to coordinate petroleum policies among member countries.

1970s: Oil crises highlight the geopolitical significance of oil; resource-rich countries gain increased revenue but face economic volatility.

1990s: Civil wars in Sierra Leone and Angola are fueled by the trade of "blood diamonds," linking natural resources to prolonged conflicts.

2000: Establishment of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the global market.

2003: Launch of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to promote transparency and accountability in the management of revenues from natural resources.

2010: Enactment of the Dodd-Frank Act in the U.S., requiring companies to disclose the use of conflict minerals sourced from the DRC and neighbouring countries.

2015: Adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including goals on sustainable resource management and strong institutions.

2016: Panama Papers leak exposes global corruption and tax evasion involving revenues from natural resources.

2020: The COVID-19 pandemic causes a global economic downturn, leading to significant fluctuations in commodity prices, and impacting resource-dependent economies.

2021: European Union's Conflict Minerals Regulation comes into full force, requiring EU companies to ensure responsible sourcing.

2023: A renewed focus on climate change and sustainable development emphasizes the need for responsible natural resource management amid global transitions to green energy.

Past Action

United Nations Initiatives: The UN has passed resolutions and established programs aimed at promoting stability and good governance in resource-rich countries. The UN Global Compact encourages businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies, including in the extractive sector.

Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (2000): Established to prevent "conflict diamonds" from financing rebel movements and fueling conflicts. Requires member states to certify that shipments of rough diamonds are conflict-free.

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) (2003): A global standard promoting transparency and accountability in countries rich in oil, gas, and mineral resources. Requires full publication and verification of company payments and government revenues.

Dodd-Frank Act Section 1502 (2010): U.S. legislation requiring companies to disclose their use of conflict minerals to discourage funding of armed groups.

European Union Conflict Minerals Regulation (2017, effective 2021): Ensures responsible sourcing of tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold, requiring EU importers to conduct due diligence on their supply chains.

African Mining Vision (2009): Adopted by the African Union to ensure that Africa's mineral resources contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

World Bank and IMF Programs: Provide financial and technical assistance to improve governance in the resource sector, including support for legal reforms and anti-corruption measures.

Natural Resource Charter: A set of principles guiding governments and societies on how to best manage opportunities created by natural resources for development.

UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015): Goals related to natural resource management, governance, and peace encourage countries to adopt policies promoting sustainable development.

Paris Agreement (2015): Emphasizes the need for economic diversification and sustainable practices, impacting fossil fuel-dependent countries. Despite these efforts, challenges persist. Implementation of international standards varies, and enforcement mechanisms are often weak. Corruption, lack of capacity, and political will hinder progress. SPECPOL recognizes the need for renewed commitment and innovative solutions to ensure that valuable commodities become a source of stability and prosperity.

Country positions

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Acknowledges challenges posed by illegal mining and armed groups controlling mineral-rich areas. Committed to improving governance and working with international partners.

Nigeria: Supports international efforts to improve transparency, such as the EITI, and has implemented domestic reforms to combat corruption and diversify its economy.

Venezuela: Emphasizes sovereignty over natural resources and has been resistant to external interference. International sanctions have complicated its position.

Norway: Advocates for transparency and good governance. Strong supporter of the EITI and provides assistance to countries seeking to improve resource management.

China: Major importer of natural resources with significant investments in resource-rich countries. Emphasizes non-interference in domestic affairs but is increasingly participating in international forums on sustainable development.

United States: Supports initiatives promoting transparency and responsible sourcing. Engages in diplomatic efforts to promote stability in resource-rich regions.

European Union: Implements regulations on conflict minerals and promotes sustainable development through trade policies. Member states support international initiatives and provide development aid for governance improvements.

Angola: Expresses commitment to transparency but faces criticism over corruption and wealth inequality. Continues efforts in post-conflict reconstruction.

Saudi Arabia: Focusing on economic diversification through its Vision 2030 plan to reduce dependence on oil revenues and promote sustainable development.

Australia and Canada: Support international efforts to promote transparency and provide technical assistance, drawing from their experience in responsible resource management.

SPECPOL Members: Hold diverse positions based on national interests and experiences. General consensus on the importance of stability in resource-rich countries, but approaches vary regarding sovereignty and international governance.

Questions a resolution must answer

How can SPECPOL promote effective governance and transparency in the management of valuable commodities in resource-rich countries?

What measures can be taken to prevent the exploitation of natural resources from fueling conflicts and financing armed groups?

How can the international community support economic diversification in countries dependent on a single commodity to reduce vulnerability to market fluctuations?

What role should international organizations and agreements play in regulating extractive industries and ensuring responsible sourcing of minerals and other resources?

How can environmental sustainability be integrated into the extraction and management of natural resources to protect ecosystems and local communities?

In what ways can capacity-building and technical assistance be provided to resource-rich countries to improve institutions and combat corruption?

How should SPECPOL address the balance between respecting national sovereignty and promoting international standards for resource management?

What strategies can be employed to engage multinational corporations in ethical practices and corporate social responsibility in resource extraction?

How can local communities be involved in decision-making processes regarding the exploitation of resources in their regions?

What steps can be taken to mitigate the impact of illegal mining and trade of valuable commodities on regional stability and security?

Conclusion

Ensuring stability in countries with valuable commodities is a complex challenge requiring a multifaceted approach. While natural resources hold the potential to drive significant economic growth and development, mismanagement and exploitation can lead to conflict, corruption, and environmental degradation. SPECPOL plays a crucial role in addressing these issues by facilitating international cooperation, promoting good governance, and supporting sustainable practices.

Delegates must consider diverse perspectives and interests, balancing respect for national sovereignty with the need for international standards and accountability. By working collaboratively to develop comprehensive resolutions, SPECPOL can contribute to transforming the "resource curse" into a "resource blessing," enabling resource-rich countries to achieve stability, prosperity, and sustainable development for the benefit of their populations and the global community.

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