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SOURCE: PCO

DATE: APRIL 2, 2008

REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE:0204DOC2

LOCATION/LIEU: BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

TIME/ HEURE: 14:30

LENGTH/DURÉE: 69:53 MINUTES

HARPER-KARZAI-SCHEFFER PANEL

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UNIDENTIFIED: I would now like to ask Prime Minister Harper, President Karzai and our Moderator, Lise Doucet, to come forward and join the Secretary General. Thank you very much. We're looking forward to a very interesting discussion

HAMID KARZAI (President of Afghanistan): All right, we'll leave this here.

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER (Secretary General, NATO): Once again, Mr. President.

HAMID KARZAI: Hi, good speech. Tremendously good.

MODERATOR: Hello and welcome to this panel that's been organized by the German Martial Fund and also the Chatham House International Royal Institute of International Affairs of Britain. My name is Lise Doucet. I'm a council member of Chatham House. I'm a BBC presenter and correspondent and I am a Canadian. (LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE) Yes, my biggest achievement is just being born. Why have we gathered here today? To consider a critical question: NATO in Afghanistan, success not in sight, failure is not an option. Now, yesterday Craig Kennedy, when he opened this Bucharest conference, said, "We have to succeed in Afghanistan. We have to." Is that an article of faith? As US Military Generals like to say, hope is not a strategy. What does success mean? Well, for NATO it's being described as nothing less, as a critical test, if not the test, of NATO resolve, if not its relevance as a 21st century fighting force. It is, as many of you know, the Alliance's biggest ground operation in its history, and in 2001, when NATO invoked article five of the Washington Treaty, it was the first time it

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had done so, all for one and one for all. 2008, is the United States, Canada and Europe still fighting the same war in Afghanistan? What does success mean? What does success mean for Afghans? What does success mean for the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai? Welcome to the Bucharest conference.

HAMID KARZAI: Thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: President Karzai knows a lot, perhaps too much, about the successes and failures in his country. He was part of the mujahadeen war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. He was a Deputy Foreign Minister in the mujahadeen government that came to power. He has led Afghanistan since 2001 and the ousting of the Taliban, and since 2004, he is an elected president. What does that mean? It mean he has to be accountable to these students who came all the way from Afghanistan if they are voting age. He has to face his Defence Minister, his national security advisor and his Foreign Minister and his economic advisor, all of whom have come here. So he also wants to know whether or not this mission is going to succeed and what Afghans have to do to help it succeed.

Prime Minister Harper also knows about winning. He likes to win. I'm told that when he graduated from high school in Canada his grade point average was 95.7. Well, unfortunately the arithmetic in the Canadian Parliament isn't quite so good. He came to power in 2006 and has been heading a minority government in Canada, and I think it's fair to say you have sometimes gambled your career and your party's political standing on the mission in Afghanistan. But Canadian Parliament has just said Canadian troops, more than 2500, can stay 'til 2011 as long as they get support. But will they get this support?

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Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. Well, in 2003 in September, I had the good fortune to be outside the UN headquarter in New York, and I got a call from the BBC and they said they've just appointed the new Secretary General for NATO. And I said, "Well, who is it?" And they said, "Jaap... Ja...Skef...Schef... The Dutch Foreign Minister." I said, yes. (LAUGHTER) I said, well, and I turned around and I said, "Well, he's just standing right next to me here in New York." So I went up and interviewed him as the Dutch Foreign Minister and I said, "Well, what will be your priorities when you take over as NATO Secretary General?" And he said, "The success of the mission in Afghanistan will be the litmus test for the success of NATO." And he says that to this day.

Now, I'm told also that you're not a silent audience. You haven't come here just to hear from our illustrious group of panellists, but you're going to have lots of questions. Why don't we nail our colours to the mast? How many of you sitting here today believe that the NATO mission in Afghanistan is actually winning, it's succeeding? How many of you think it's losing? Oh! How many think, as some do, that actually it's not winning, but it's not losing either? Great. Well, we can't guarantee the success of the mission in Afghanistan, but let's hope at least for a successful panel discussion today. Let me begin with you, President Karzai. 2001, world leaders stood beside you and said, "We will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Afghanistan. We are with you for the long run." You come to Bucharest. They're worried about a hundred troops here, a hundred troops there, how long will they stay, "well, I'm worried about my government." Are you worried? Does it leave you uneasy that the resolve may not be enough to tackle the formidable problems in your country?

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HAMID KARZAI: Thank you my friend, Lise, thank you very much. I'm glad you took a vote here, and it demonstrated once again that success is there. So according to this vote, I would change the heading. I would say, "success is in sight; of course failure is not an option". Saying this, in 2001 when the international community came to Afghanistan and liberated Afghanistan, I don't know if it sends you the message that I have, the liberation of Afghanistan. Afghanistan was a country that was no longer in the hands of its people. Afghanistan was ruled from the (inaudible) of Afghanistan. Afghanistan was in the hands of terrorists. Afghanistan was in the hands of tyranny, worst of all. Now, the arrival of the international community, led by the United States and helped by the countries around Afghanistan as well, brought liberation to Afghanistan. That is a major, great success. After liberation, the international community began to rebuild Afghanistan, rebuild the state of Afghanistan, rebuild the political institutions of Afghanistan, rebuild the economy of Afghanistan, rebuild the infrastructure of Afghanistan, rebuild the security institutions of Afghanistan. Let's count as to which one of these have we achieved.

MODERATOR: Well, let's, no, let's first get to the question, which is are you worried about the continuing resolve?

HAMID KARZAI: I'm coming to that.

MODERATOR: We're going to get to the successes in a minute.

HAMID KARZAI: No, I have to be fair to the international community, so I'll have to come to (inaudible)...

MODERATOR: Yes, well, we have lots of chance, but yes, but let's...

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HAMID KARZAI: Ok.

MODERATOR: Have you come here an uneasy president?

HAMID KARZAI: Fine, fine. Now, since you all know what we have achieved, and I'll come to that crucial point...

MODERATOR: Yeah, we'll come to the achievements later.

HAMID KARZAI: ...we in Afghanistan are very grateful to the international community for having brought us liberation first, and then for having helped us build all those institutions and have reconstruction and have roads and schools and return of 4.5 million refugees and countless other achievements. I'm very grateful and I'm sure they will stay with us because the tough part is over. The next is the continuation of this journey, which we will complete together.

MODERATOR: And you're sure Afghans want them to stay.

HAMID KARZAI: Absolutely.

MODERATOR: Ok. Prime Minister Harper, you threw down the gauntlet. You said Canadians would stay but we need help. So you've come to Bucharest, you're hoping to get a commitment of a thousand troops, a battle group, plus some aerial drones, some helicopters, some vehicles as well, light armoured vehicles. You thought you had it. Nicolas Sarkozy announced in London that there would be a thousand troops going to Afghanistan. His Prime Minister yesterday said, "Well, actually, it'll be a few hundred, and most of them will be in Kabul." Are you a worried Prime Minister now?

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): No, I'm not worried. I'm very optimistic that we will achieve our objectives. When we had the last summit at Riga, it was, you know, widely declared afterward a failure because we and other countries, Secretary General had gone and said we needed troop commitments. Well, we didn't have greater troop commitments at the summit, but if you look at the two years following the summit, we got significantly enhanced troop commitments in the south. By our calculations, we have twice as many countries now supplying twice as many troops as we did in 2006. Now, obviously our timelines are shorter...

MODERATOR: You've got a year. You've got a year.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Our timelines are shorter. We need a partner in Afghanistan that will deliver, you know, around about a thousand troops, and we need to procure the equipment, which is ultimately our responsibility, although we need some help to get it on the timelines we need it on. I'm very optimistic. Whether we achieve it at this summit or in the weeks to come, we've had good discussions with our allies, and let's remember here, our objective...

MODERATOR: But how can you optimistically give...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: ...if I can be...no, if I can be clear here for a second...

MODERATOR: ...if the French promised...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: ... if I can be clear here for a second, our objective is not simply to procure these troops for ourselves. It's to also make sure there continues to be enhanced NATO participation so that we are successful across Afghanistan. So, you know, whether the French

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send troops to a particular province or whether the French send troops, more troops that allows other troops to be deployed to help us, it's all the same to us. What we want to make sure is that we get our partner and also that the overall NATO mission is enhanced, not detracted by our demands.

MODERATOR: But it's not very encouraging, is it, if there's already a French wobble in the course of less than a week. Sarkozy says one thing in London, and another thing is said in the French Parliament.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, we'll see what the French ultimately decide, but in fairness, the French have made no commitment to us...

MODERATOR: What have they told you?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: No, they have made no commitment to us. And Mr. Sarkozy has made no ironclad commitment to NATO. I think anything that France does over and beyond what it's already doing is a victory, and is a significant step forward, and I think increased French engagement of any number in any province is a good development of this summit.

MODERATOR: We understand that George Bush has told you personally that they will help you, either way. Wherever the French go, the Americans will send some troops down to the south to help you in Kandahar. Do you have what's being reported as an ironclad commitment from Washington?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I make it a habit never to speak on behalf of other people.

MODERATOR: But for you...

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We've had good discussions with our allies and I am convinced that we will achieve our objectives and achieve it in a way that causes the overall level of troop commitment to Afghanistan to be increased, not merely shifted laterally.

MODERATOR: Has George Bush promised you that whatever happens...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I say, you'll have to ask Mr. Bush what his position is.

MODERATOR: But you actually feel now that you will get a commitment?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We're very confident.

MODERATOR: What does this show you, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer? The US Defence Secretary, Mr. Gates, warned that NATO risks becoming a two-tier alliance. He said, "We must not develop in that way," and many are saying actually it is, to all intents and purposes, a two-tier alliance, that the whole idea that everything has to be on consensus doesn't work when you come to Afghanistan because in fact many of the NATO members have different ideas about what the mission is about and what they are ready to commit for political, legislative reasons.

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I don't think that the consensus principle has ever harmed NATO or prevented NATO from acting. I mean, consensus is a sacred principle in NATO and we should keep it. That's remark number one. Remark number two is that, and I side with Prime Minister Harper, if you see that now for instance in the south where the going gets very tough and the Canadian contingent, which is doing a great job in Kandahar province, knows all about that, with all the fatalities involved, that

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we have 14 nations in the south, one-four, that we have all the 26 NATO allies in Afghanistan; I do not see a two-tier alliance, to be quite honest. I do see, from time to time, and I have to be a realist from time to time – not always – I do see that certain governments are bound, as you say, by parliamentary mandates, which create lines which are difficult to cross. I think, let me say, there's also (inaudible) is a bit unfair always to discuss Germany. Germany is a major troop contributor and I'm a realist as NATO Secretary General. I have to be. If I want to have the forces with the limitations, with the caveats, or no forces at all, my choice is for the forces. But as long as I'm NATO Secretary General, and I've often discussed this with Prime Minister Harper and President Karzai, I'll make my continued pleas, we should get rid of our caveats. Because it is necessary that we all share the same burden. But given the fact that we now have 47 000 troops in Afghanistan, 14 nations in the south, all of them actively involved, some in a very active way, if you look at the number of the population, then I do not see a two-tier alliance. I don't.

MODERATOR: Do you actually see that it is a possibility that those caveats – I understand there's about 50 caveats that are now operating in Afghanistan, and they don't operate in other places, I understand, including Kosovo. Will...do you ever foresee that they would ever be eliminated? Or is it a fact of life in NATO?

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER: There has never been a military operation in history without caveats. Never. But we can do with less caveats in Afghanistan. I mean, that has been my mantra; it still is. I'm going to continue to make pleas for less limitations and less caveats, how complicated that politically might be for nations. Because the less caveats we have, the more efficient and effective a military commander can be, and I add

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that it is an important element, political solidarity in the alliance. What is at the heart of the debate with Prime Minister Harper in Canada? It's this element. It is a nation which has suffered a lot of fatalities. We all have to fight from time to times critical public opinion, so I'll fight that fight in the bureaucratic, political sense, with Prime Minister. I do it with President Karzai and with others. But I do not see a two-tier alliance. That is really not the case.

MODERATOR: But there is...it's not just a caveat problem, it's also a political problem. When Nicolas Sarkozy came back from London, he faced the wrath of the Socialists who said, "We don't want to be part of an American agenda. We don't want to be in a war that's unpopular because it's fought," as they would see it, "with American tactics. We don't want to send more troops." It's said that Angela Merkel doesn't actually want to have a debate in Germany about this because she also worries about her leftist rivals in the German Parliament. She worries about members of her own coalition, because they actually have a culture in Germany that does not want to be putting its troops on the front line, very different to what the Americans are discussing, which is part of their global war on terror.

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER: That is a bit unfair. Of course there is a distinction to be made between the United States of America as a global power and Germany as a very important power, but not a global one. But it is not true. Germany has also suffered fatalities in Afghanistan. What is important is that political leaders, and we are of that type as we're sitting here on stage, that goes for President Karzai, for Prime Minister Harper, who has finally realized in Canada, against the very critical public opinion and the same goes for Chancellor Merkel, that there are thousands of German

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forces in Afghanistan, that there is an enormous Canadian presence in Afghanistan, so those political leaders show that they lead and they have to lead, because public opinion, from time to time, you're right, is critical. But that is not a reason to give up, and I'm telling you, no ally is giving up.

MODERATOR: But that's not the point. Because of course they're there, and many other nations are there, but the disagreement is on what they will do in Afghanistan. And if the need now is for more fighting troops, if that is one of the critical...actually this is what Mr. Harper would like, more fighting troops down in the south, then you do have a two-tier arrangement, because certain countries will do certain things – we're not questioning their commitment to be in Afghanistan. We're questioning what they're willing to do there.

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I still don't agree with you, Lise. I still don't agree, for the simple reason that first of all, the answer in Afghanistan at the end of the day is not a military one. It's called development. It's called reconstruction. For development and reconstruction to take place, we need military force, and unfortunately we need combat from time to time, because there are spoilers, as the President and I used to call them. They don't want to see reconstruction. So we need military forces, yes, and I'll not be happy and satisfied until we have filled for the full 100 percent what our military advisors tell us and tell the nations to deliver. And we have not yet delivered that. I think we're going to make progress in Bucharest, but we have not delivered that. But let us realize – and that is the reason that tomorrow we'll see President Karzai, Secretary Ban Ki-Moon and all the others. The final answer is not a military one. It is a long-term commitment by the international community, spearheaded by the United Nations, the

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European Union, the G8, major donors, under Afghan ownership and under Afghan leadership. That is the question.

MODERATOR: President Karzai, do you think there needs to be more NATO troops in Afghanistan, that the military side of it has to be boosted if there is to be success?

HAMID KARZAI: Well, first of all since you spoke about Canada and Canada is present in Afghanistan, let me...and in front of the Canadian audience, thank the people of Canada for all that they have done for us. A lot of us can't imagine what is it that Canada has achieved in Afghanistan, with the sacrifice of their men and women in service, with millions of dollars of Canadian resources coming to Afghanistan. So, Mr. Prime Minister, once again, I'm very, very grateful for what you have done. Having said this, Afghanistan need to keep growing in development. Afghanistan needs to complete the rebuilding of its institutions, including the security institutions, the military and the police. Afghanistan needs to continue to reform its judiciary. Afghanistan needs to raise its capacity. Afghanistan needs to raise the standard of living of its people. Afghanistan needs to do a lot of things that you can't imagine in the rest of the world. In other words, we have started from scratch, from zero, and we have moved six years on. We need years to move ahead. In order for us to achieve that, we need the continuous presence and support and backing and (inaudible) of the international community in Afghanistan. That would require a military presence in order for today to fight against terrorism, and in order for that security presence to boost the Afghan security institutions. And it also needs in economic side, for Afghanistan to develop through the help of the international community. So, for some time to come, Afghanistan will depend

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on the international community for all that it needs to achieve. For us, of course, as the Afghan people, and also for the larger interest, security interest of the international community. So yes to your question.

MODERATOR: And what do you say to governments in NATO, non-NATO members who are helping your country who say, "President Karzai, we want very much to help Afghanistan, but we need a more effective government. We need you to crack down on corruption. We need you to put better governors. We feel that it's not working the way it should."

HAMID KARZAI: Very true, very true.

MODERATOR: What do you say to them as they are saying to you?

HAMID KARZAI: That's very true. That's exactly also the demand of the Afghan people. That's exactly the need of the hour in Afghanistan. As I mentioned earlier, we started from nothing, and we have grown in six years beyond our imaginations in real terms from that point of having nothing. Therefore, Afghanistan needs to raise its capacity, both in civilian and military sides. Afghanistan needs to deliver all the services that any normal society would need: a clean government, an efficient government, a clean judiciary, an efficient judiciary, the provision of proper services, justice, human rights, the promotion and strengthening of democracy, the building of the institutions, 'til Afghanistan is properly entrenched in the objectives that it has and the achievements that it has. That's the right demand, and that's what we should legitimately be doing for Afghanistan.

MODERATOR: And not succeeding so far, is that a capacity problem? You don't have the resources, a country emerging from 25

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years of war, one of the poorest countries in the world still. Or is it a political problem, that there are people that you can't move against for political reasons? You're, I understand, a man who wants to be elected president again when the elections take place I think at the end of this year. Or is it a political problem, that your hands are tied?

HAMID KARZAI: It continues to be more of a capacity problem, less of a political problem. When we started, it was both a political problem and a capacity problem. As we have moved on for the past six years, we have reduced the political handicaps that we had, we have added to the political strength of the government, the legitimacy of the state; it's more now a question of capacity, and the more we add to that, the more our ability to address the difficulties of the Afghan people.

MODERATOR: Prime Minister Harper, I know Canada has been a leader in this approach to development, which is the three Ds, defence, diplomacy and development, but your critics in Canada say actually it's tilted too much. You look at Kandahar, you look at your provisional reconstruction team, the PRT, there's 350 military, five, Foreign Affairs, six from the Canadian Development Agency and ten from other civilian agencies. So the critics say it's tilted. Are you...does this need to be addressed? Is there lessons now for your involvement?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, we've accepted the judgement for some time that we would like to, you know, we would like to tilt it more towards development and governance. That all said, first of all, I'm not sure you would measure that by the number of personnel. By definition...

MODERATOR: It's just one indication, yes.

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: ...military engagement is labour intensive. But look, I think the most important thing (inaudible) success on the military side. I think it's important that we understand what this is. You know, you ask the Secretary General about increasing troop levels. Yes, we need increasing troop levels, but we do not believe that the ultimate success on the military side is that NATO will increase troop levels until the point where we snuff out the resistance. That's not realistic. What success is realistically is yes, we'll build up our troop levels, but we will also mentor and train the Afghan forces so they are ultimately able to manage the security environment going forward, manage it, not necessarily eliminate the insurgency. Afghanistan's had...this country, as you know, has had civil war for 30 years. I think it's unrealistic to think we're going to eliminate all violent conflict of all kinds in the space of two or three years. But if we can mentor the Afghan forces so they can increasingly take the lead, and then allow the international community to focus on development and allow, of course, the Afghan government to improve governance, I think that's our definition of mid-term success.

MODERATOR: Do you think that will be achieved by 2011, which is your...if you (inaudible)...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: That is our objective. That was part of the resolution we passed in Parliament. We always start these things with determination that we will meet...we will meet our benchmarks. President Karzai has told me he believes this can be done in Kandahar. That's what we're working towards. And look, I think part of the problem with any military operation, especially a difficult one as we have in Kandahar and as NATO has throughout Afghanistan, unless at some point you establish some

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timelines and some objectives, you're not going to meet them. We all know that these military engagements, by definition, tend to have mission creep that just go on and on and on. So we've set some defined benchmarks and we will do our best to achieve those, at least to show substantial progress in relatively short order.

MODERATOR: But there are some leaders, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain, your own military chief General Hillier has basically come out and said bluntly, it will take a generation. Let's be honest. That to actually put Afghanistan to right, after 25 years of war, it will take a generation. It won't be the exit dates that the Dutch, the Canadians, the British had put on it. It will actually take the long run. That, to me, doesn't seem to be happening either in Canada or other countries. Just what is involved?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I think it depends on what you mean by "success". I say, if you took the definition of "success", which could be Afghan forces able to ensure a, you know, a western equivalent security environment, maybe that's a 20-25 year task. If you're saying Afghan forces able to manage the day-to-day security in most of the country, we think that's an objective that if we put our...if we put our focus and determination towards it is achievable in much shorter timeframe. That way you'd still have western troops in the country, you would still have a security situation managed, but it would be different than now, and we've seen, you know, we're not pulling these objectives out of midair. We have seen in our sector significant improvements in the size and fighting capacity of the Afghan forces over the past couple of years.

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MODERATOR: Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, are we going to see at one point will be made public your new military political document, "A New Strategy For Afghanistan"? It's now an internal document. Will we find out what your benchmarks are? What actually...what is your new strategy if this is going to start having greater traction, greater success?

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I don't know if you're going to find out what all our benchmarks are. I very much doubt that. But what we are doing here at the Bucharest summit is first of all, agree on what we call that vision document as I mentioned in my short speech, which is a sort of commitment, because that is very much supported by the non-NATO troop contributors, and I know, for instance, from my talks with President Karzai that he also considers this a useful and good document. We have an underlying document, which is an internal document, which in Prime Minister Harper's words tell us what we have to do, what we have to achieve. But let's not make...that was a slight criticism, if you allow me, I had on your analysis. It will take, I think, even more than a generation to bring a nation which the Taliban had brought back to the middle ages in 2001, the middle ages – I think, Mr. President, I'm not exaggerating, apart from being the worst human rights violators – to the middle ages. If you look at Afghanistan in '01, you look at Afghanistan in 2008, I don't hesitate to say that we have made remarkable progress. It doesn't mean that the challenges are huge, because it is a big nation. It is, as far as infrastructure is concerned, terrain, stunningly beautiful, but complicated. Because if a farmer wants to bring his products to the market, you need roads, and we have to build roads, and there are not roads everywhere. So it's a huge challenge.

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