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Issue Brief

Russia's New Maritime Doctrine

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Summary

The Russian Maritime Doctrine, released on 31 July 2022, provides an insight into how Moscow envisages Russia's role in the maritime domain. It reveals a more confident and assertive Russia and suggests an increased possibility of conflict with the West. The desire to deepen maritime cooperation with India, including seeking logistic support facilities in the Indian Ocean Region, are welcome opportunities for India. Several synergies with Russia's maritime doctrine exist, as reflected in India's Arctic Policy and Deep Ocean Mission programme.

Introduction

The Russian maritime doctrine, a strategic planning document that reflects the official view on the national maritime policy of Russia,¹ was signed into a decree by President Vladimir Putin during Russian Navy (RuN) Day celebrations in St. Petersburg on 31 July 2022. It goes into effect immediately and supersedes the 2015 edition.² The doctrine was adopted for the first time in 2001 and was last updated in July 2015.³

The original 56-page document in Russian⁴ comprises 106 Articles in 10 Sections containing over 15,000 words. The 2015 version⁵ had four fewer sections and was shorter by over 3,000 words. The new policy adds sections on challenges and threats to national security, priorities for the development of maritime activities, mobilisation training and readiness, and procedure for using the instruments of national maritime policy, making the document far more comprehensive in its scope.

The various sections of the 2015 and 2022 editions are tabulated below for comparison.

Table 1

Russia’s Maritime Doctrine: Sections in 2015 and 2022 Policy Documents

Section	2015	Section	2022
I	General Provisions	I	General provisions
II	National Maritime Policy	II	National interests, challenges and threats to national security of the Russian Federation in the World Ocean
		III	Strategic objectives and principles of the National Maritime Policy

¹ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, President of Russia, 31 July 2022.

² “Russian Federation Naval Doctrine Approved”, President of Russia, 31 July 2022.

³ “Russia Adopts Updated Maritime Doctrine; Lists U.S., NATO As Primary Threats”, RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 31 July 2022.

⁴ The Assessment is based on an unofficial English translation of the original Maritime Doctrine in Russian.

⁵ “The 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, Russia Maritime Studies Institute and Anna Davis, 2015.

III	Content of the National Maritime Policy	IV	Priorities for the development of maritime activities in functional areas
IV	Support for Implementation of the National Maritime Policy	V	Regional directions of national maritime policy
V	State Administration of Maritime Activities	VI	Provision of marine activities
		VII	Mobilization training and mobilization readiness in the field of maritime activities
		VIII	Fundamentals of State management of marine activities. Tasks of state authorities and other state bodies
VI	Conclusion	IX	The procedure for using the instruments of national maritime policy to protect the national interests of the Russian Federation
		X	Conclusion

Note: Text marked in bold denotes additional sections of the 2022 policy document, as against the 2015 doctrine.

Section I: Basic Principles of the Maritime Doctrine

Section I defines the national maritime policy, Russia’s maritime activities, national interests, risks, threats and challenges to national interests. Russia’s maritime potential is defined as a combination of its merchant fleet, the RuN, fishing, research and specialised fleets, forces of the Russian Ministry of Defence, Federal Security Service, Federal Guard Service, Russian shipbuilding infrastructure and organisations, facilities and means of exploration, production and transportation of marine hydrocarbons and other mineral resources.

Section II: Russia’s national interests, challenges and threats to national security

The national interests stand doubled, from seven in the 2015 version to 14 in the current one. The notable additions include preservation of great maritime power status for Russia, maintaining strategic stability in the oceans, the right to explore

the mineral resources of the international seabed, safety of strategically important offshore pipelines, guaranteed access to global shipping routes, development of the Russian Arctic zone as a strategic resource base and of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a national transport corridor. The national interests of 2015 and 2022 editions are tabulated below.

Table 2
Russia’s National Interests

2015	2022
a) inviolability of Russian Federation sovereignty over the internal waters, territorial seas, their sea floor and subsoil resources, as well as the airspace above them;	1) Russia’s independence, territorial integrity, and inviolability of sovereignty, in internal waters, territorial sea, seabed and subsoil, as well as the airspace above them; 2) Russian sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the exclusive economic zone and on the continental shelf ;
b) sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Russian Federation, exercised within the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of the Russian Federation;	3) Preservation of the status of a great maritime power for Russia, aiming at maintaining strategic stability in the oceans, strengthening national influence and developing mutually beneficial partnerships in the maritime domain in the emerging multipolar world; 4) Development of Russia’s maritime potential and strengthening of the defence capability in the world ocean;
c) freedom in the high seas, including freedom of navigation, operating in airspace, fishing, conducting scientific research, and laying underwater cables and pipelines;	5) Freedom of the high seas, including freedom of navigation, overflight, fishing, scientific research, the right to lay underwater cables and pipelines, the right to explore the mineral resources of the international seabed;
d) search and rescue of human life at sea;	6) Safety of strategically important offshore pipelines used for transportation of hydrocarbons;
e) operation of vital sea lines of communications;	7) Ensuring guaranteed access to global shipping routes for Russia;
f) prevention of sea pollution from production, consumption, and disposal wastes;	8) Undertaking naval operations in the high seas to ensure and protect the national interests of the Russia, and to maintain strategic and regional stability; 9) Preservation of human life at sea;

g) Integrated use of the World Ocean’s resources and space for the purpose of sustainable economic and social development of the state and its coastal regions.	10) Stability of global shipping routes; 11) Ensuring environmental safety in the oceans, preventing pollution and preserving the biological diversity of the marine environment; 12) Comprehensive study and rational exploitation of resources of the oceans to ensure sustainable economic and social development of Russia, especially its coastal territories; 13) Development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) as a strategic resource base and its sustainable exploitation; 14) Development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a national transport corridor, competitive in the world market
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Note: Text marked in bold denotes additions to Russia’s national interests in the 2022 policy document, as against the 2015 document.

Prioritisation of World’s Maritime Areas

In another departure from its 2015 doctrine, the new version has prioritised world’s maritime areas as **Vital**, **Important** and **Other** based on Russia’s national interests. Earlier, the world ocean areas were simply listed as the main regional priority areas.

Vital are those areas which are directly related to Russia’s sovereignty, and territorial integrity and loss of control over them may endanger Russia’s national security. These are Russia’s internal waters, Territorial Seas (TS), Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), Continental Shelf (CS), and the Russian Arctic, including the waters of the NSR, Sea of Okhotsk and the Russian sector of the Caspian Sea.⁶ In the Vital areas, Russia will use its military force, if necessary.⁷ This intention of use of force in quasi-sovereign areas such as the TS and EEZ and the waters of the NSR outside the TS is likely to elicit criticism as being excess of the rights provided to a coastal state under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Important areas are those that significantly affect Russia’s economic development, national and regional security. These are Russia’s adjacent waters, including the Azov and Black Seas, the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Straits—Kurils and Black and Baltic Seas, and global shipping routes including those along the Asian and African coasts. In these areas, Russia intends to use mainly political, diplomatic, economic,

⁶ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Section II, Article 14.

⁷ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 103 (1).

informational, and other non-forceful tools, and only when such means are exhausted, it intends to use military force proportional to the prevailing situation.⁸

Other areas are those that are not classified as vital or important area.⁹

Calling Out United States and NATO

Again, in a first, the Russian maritime doctrine calls out the United States (four times) and its allies accusing them of seeking to contain Russia by exerting political, economic, and military pressure. This, the doctrine states, is also reflected in the increased naval presence of the US and its allies in Russia’s proximate waters. It also blames the US of having a strategic aim to dominate world’s oceans, influence development of international norms—including those related to shipping and oceans energy resources, restrict access of ocean resources and vital global shipping routes to Russia and seeking to achieve overwhelming naval superiority, including enhancing naval combat capabilities of other states.¹⁰

The outburst is probably in response to the US also calling out Russia as a primary threat, as a revisionist power, which aims to weaken US influence in the world. Russia found mention in the US National Security Strategy (2017) 25 times. The US accused Russia of challenging American power, influence, and interests, and its attempts to erode American security and prosperity.¹¹ The US’s Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, by President Joe Biden, has named Russia six times, calling it disrupting and destabilising, which has invested heavily in efforts meant to check US strengths and preventing US from defending its interests and allies around the world.¹²

The other significant threats to Russia’s security are listed as territorial claims against Russia, enhancement of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military infrastructure close to Russian borders and increase in exercises conducted in Russia’s proximate waters, efforts by a number of states to weaken Russia’s control of the NSR, the build-up of foreign naval presence in the Arctic, the increasing conflict potential in the region and attempts by a number of States to change existing maritime legal regimes.¹³

⁸ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Section II, Article 15.

⁹ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Section II, Article 16.

¹⁰ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Article 22.

¹¹ “**National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017**”, The White House, December 2017.

¹² “**Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, March 2021**”, The White House, March 2021.

¹³ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Article 22.

Risks for Russia's Maritime Activities

Meagre Russian-flagged merchant shipping, its significant foreign trade dependence on pipelines, minuscule and dated Russian marine scientific research fleet, sanctions on Russian shipbuilding enterprises and oil and gas companies, including those related to the transfer of modern technologies, equipment supplies and long-term financing, pending maritime delimitation in the Arctic, attempts to revise the international law governing maritime activities in the Arctic, climate change and lack of adequate logistics bases outside Russia to support its ships operating in distant waters are some of the important risks listed in the doctrine for Russia's maritime activities.¹⁴ Additionally, the doctrine mentions sudden and difficult-to-predict pandemics of dangerous diseases such as the COVID-19 as new risks for maritime activities.

Section III: Strategic objectives and principles of Russia's national maritime policy

These objectives are a statement of intent and provide a peek into Russia's goals and the course that it intends to chart in the maritime domain in the coming years. The most noticeable objective is Russia's intention to develop as a great maritime power.¹⁵ This has been elevated from a mention in passing desire in its 2015 doctrine to a primary objective in the 2022 version. Other noticeable objectives include ensuring guaranteed access to the world oceans and their resources, strategic and regional deterrence of potential adversaries, increasing the competitiveness of the Russian shipping and that of the NSR, enhancing the combat capabilities of RuN, and increasing the competitiveness of Russian science in terms of fundamental and applied scientific research of the oceans.

Section IV: Priorities for the development of maritime activities in five functional areas

Development of offshore pipeline systems is an addition to the four functional areas listed in the 2015 doctrine—Development of Shipping; Development and conservation of the world's ocean resources; Marine scientific research; and Naval activities. This is possibly a fallout of the ongoing Russia–Ukraine conflict. In the 2015 version, 'Development of offshore pipeline systems' was listed as a sub-section under *Development and Conservation of the World Ocean Resources*.

¹⁴ "Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation", no. 1, Article 23.

¹⁵ "Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation", no. 1, Article 28 (1).

Development of Shipping

The policy calls for creating a favourable organisational, legal and economic environment conducive to its expansion and increasing competitiveness, and development of Russian coastal and port infrastructure. The noticeable priorities in this area are for creating conditions for the development of the NSR as a national transport corridor, and Russia’s active participation in setting international norms and standards for global shipping, and to revise existing maritime international shipping laws.¹⁶

Development and conservation of the Ocean resources

Main priority areas are for the development of marine fisheries and aquaculture, development of a distant water fishing fleet, and enhanced Russian participation in the regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).¹⁷ For the development of mineral and hydrocarbon resources, the noticeable priorities are listed as enhanced geological exploration and hydrocarbon production on Russia’s CS, including in the Arctic, and exploration and extraction of mineral resources in the international seabed areas assigned to Russia by the International Seabed Authority (ISA).¹⁸

Development of offshore pipeline systems

To reduce dependence on onshore pipelines passing through the territories of other states, the document calls for ensuring effective functioning and development of offshore pipelines. This is possibly aimed at circumventing gas supplies through Ukraine, Belarus and Poland¹⁹ which use the land route and instead increase the transportation through the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, through the Baltic Sea, and Turkish Stream pipeline, through the Black Sea.

Marine scientific research

Priority areas include research of military-political, economic and legal aspects of resource exploitation in the high seas, conducting ecological and climatic studies in the high seas, including in Antarctica and Arctic, construction of new research vessels, development of robotic systems for deep sea ocean exploration, and development of international cooperation and elimination of red tape in fundamental and applied scientific research of the oceans. There are several areas of commonality with India’s recently released Arctic Policy and Deep Ocean Mission programme.

Naval activities

Naval activities are defined as the activity of the State to prevent aggression against Russia, and the realisation and protection of Russian maritime interests. They are

¹⁶ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Article 37.

¹⁷ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Article 40.

¹⁸ “**Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation**”, no. 1, Article 41.

¹⁹ Yamal gas pipeline.

carried out in accordance with Russia’s state policy in the field of naval activities, duly approved by its President. This section has been reduced from 12 paragraphs in the 2015 doctrine to just two, in the 2022 version.

Section V: Regional Directions of Maritime Policy

The policy assigns directions of national maritime policy across various regions of the world. These are divided into the Arctic, Pacific, Atlantic (Baltic, Azov-Black Sea and Mediterranean basins), Caspian Sea, Indian Ocean, Pacific and Antarctic regions.²⁰ This section is much expanded from the 2015 version where the regions were arranged in a clockwise manner being the Atlantic, Arctic, Pacific, Caspian, Indian Ocean and Antarctic. Listing the Arctic first is also symbolic of the enhanced strategic importance that Russia attaches to the region.

Arctic

The policy is based on the Arctic’s significant resource potential, the increasing importance of NSR, enhanced role of the RuN, and the transformation of the Arctic into a region of global economic and military contestation.²¹ Of the 21 directions listed for the Arctic region, the prominent ones include strengthening Russia’s lead in the study, development, mapping and safe exploitation of Arctic’s resources, strengthening of the Russia’s Northern and Pacific Fleets, comprehensive development of the NSR to ensure safe year-round passage, defending the historical international legal regime of inland waters in the NSR, control of foreign naval activities in the NSR waters, development of natural resources, and the construction of a trans-Arctic underwater fibre-optic communication line. Arctic and NSR’s enhanced strategic significance is reflected in the new doctrine with 56 and 13 mentions respectively against 33 and five in the previous iteration.

Pacific

Russia seeks to reduce the threat level to its national security and ensure strategic stability in the Pacific.²² The main priorities include overcoming the economic and infrastructural isolation of the Far East from the industrially developed regions of Russia and its integration with the economic space of the Asia-Pacific, increasing the combat potential of the Pacific Fleet, enhancing naval presence, creation of logistics support bases, setting up of specialised terminals for liquified natural gas (LNG) production and shipment, and new technologies for exploration and extraction of mineral resources.

²⁰ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 49.

²¹ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 50.

²² “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 52.

Atlantic

The Doctrine highlights the presence of NATO, accusing it of seeking direct confrontation with Russia and its allies, calling out the unacceptability of NATO’s plans to advance its military infrastructure to Russia’s borders.²³

Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Azov Sea

In the Baltic Sea,²⁴ Russia aims for further development of the underwater pipelines and development of the Baltic Fleet. The doctrine aims to comprehensively strengthen Russia’s geopolitical position, ensuring a favourable international legal regime for the use, exploration and exploitation of resources, laying of underwater pipelines, strengthening of the Black Sea Fleet, development of infrastructure in the Crimea and the Krasnodar coast and development of shipbuilding enterprises of Crimea and Sevastopol.²⁵

Mediterranean Sea

Russia aims to ensure permanent naval presence centred on its base in Syria, and through creation and development of logistics facilities in other states.²⁶

Caspian Sea

The doctrine highlights the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, signed between Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan on 12 August 2018²⁷ as the cornerstone document for its activities in the region.²⁸

Indian Ocean

The 2015 doctrine had *listed development of friendly relations with India as the most important goal in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)*. This has now been upgraded to *development of strategic partnership and naval cooperation with India*.²⁹ Further, while the earlier version *aimed at strengthening positive interaction with other states of the region*, the 2022 version seeks *expansion of cooperation with Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other states of the region*.³⁰ The naming of the countries is significant. In the entire document, no other countries have been named, other than US, as a strategic threat and rival.

²³ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Articles 53, 54, 55.

²⁴ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 56 (2).

²⁵ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 56 (3).

²⁶ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 56 (4).

²⁷ “Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea”, President of Russia, 12 August 2018.

²⁸ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 58.

²⁹ “Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 1, Article 59 (1).

³⁰ Ibid.

The other priorities in the IOR are to make efforts towards turning the region into a zone of peace and stability, expansion of Russian shipping, maintaining Russian naval presence in the Persian Gulf through logistics support bases in the Red Sea and in the IOR, participation in the fight against piracy and conducting marine scientific research in the region.

China’s Omission and India’s Elevation

The 2015 doctrine had stated that *an important component of the National Maritime Policy in the Pacific Ocean regional area is the development of friendly relations with China, as well as expanding positive cooperation with other states in the region.*³¹ This does not find mention in the 2022 version, which is intriguing, to state the least.

Earlier, in Russia’s National Security Strategy (NSS), updated on 2 July 2021,³² relations with India and China had been designated as one of its foreign policy priorities.³³ Another notable change in the NSS was that relations with India and China were combined in just one paragraph, while in the 2009 and 2015 versions, they were treated separately, with China preceding India.³⁴ While in 2015, Russia assigned the ‘privileged strategic partnership’ with India an ‘important role’, the 2021 iteration saw the relationship develop into a status of a ‘particularly’ privileged strategic partnership.³⁵ This trend has now been repeated in the 2022 maritime doctrine.

The omission of China and upgradation of India from the 2015 to the 2022 version of Russia’s maritime doctrine needs further and in-depth analysis. Perhaps, it highlights the unease that Russia has, being a junior partner in the relationship, and its past history of longstanding tensions with China in the Russian Far East. It also presents an opportunity for India to build deeper relations with Russia in the maritime domain, explained in greater detail in this paper.³⁶

Antarctic

As one of the States parties to the Antarctic Treaty system (ATS), Russia has full participation in dealing with the related international issues pertaining to the Antarctic. Among other priorities, Russia seeks the development of satellite

³¹ “The 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, no. 5, Article 63.

³² “What Russia’s National Security Strategy Has to Say About Asia”, *The Diplomat*, 14 July 2021.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Elizabeth Buchanan, “Russia’s 2021 National Security Strategy: Cool Change Forecasted for the Polar Regions”, RUSI, 14 July 2021.

³⁶ Anurag Bisen, “Prospects of Maritime Cooperation between India and Russia in Indian Ocean Region, Arctic and Russian Far East”, Occasional Paper No. 60, MP-IDSA, August 2022.

communication and navigation systems in Antarctica, and expansion of ground-based support systems for the Russian global navigation satellite system GLONASS.

Section VI: Provision of Marine Activities

The doctrine provides direction to activities including shipbuilding, security, protection and preservation of the marine environment, information support, international legal support and international cooperation.

Shipbuilding

The policy prioritises construction of all kinds of ships mainly at Russian shipyards with indigenous equipment, preference to placement of orders of domestic consumers, ensuring Russia’s technological independence in shipbuilding, maintaining state control over strategically important shipbuilding organisations, ensuring the capabilities for the construction of modern aircraft carriers, and maintaining world leadership in the construction and operation of nuclear icebreakers.

Safety of navigation

Priorities include *inter alia* safety of navigation along the NSR, creation and development of Russian independent navigation systems as an alternative to global navigation satellite system and increase of density of observation points of meteorological network in the Arctic.

Search-and-Rescue (SAR) support of marine activities

This includes organisational and technical measures, search, rescue, underwater and diving operations aimed at assisting damaged and distressed ships, vessels and other marine objects, rescuing their crews, as well as performing work on the recovery of sunken ships and vessels. Prominent priorities include improvement of the regulatory framework to increase the efficiency of SAR, creation of a unified interdepartmental automated system for exchange of information on location of vessels and the conduct of SAR operations, development of Arctic integrated rescue centres, and enhancing international cooperation in SAR at sea.

Medical and sanitary support of marine activities

These are the set of measures carried out to ensure health and occupational hygiene of seafarers, personnel of marine infrastructure facilities, including providing them with medical care, as well as to the passengers temporarily on board a ship (vessel). Among the notable priorities, Russia intends to improve the medical and sanitary provision of marine activities carried out in the Arctic, and undertake construction of modern hospital vessels capable of providing Russian Navy presence worldwide for performance of humanitarian tasks.

International cooperation in the field of maritime activities

Russia seeks to conduct joint naval exercises with foreign navies and coast guards, expand annual official visits and port calls of RuN, expand international cooperation in safety of maritime activities, and develop international legal framework on the prevention of incidents at sea.

Section VII: Mobilization training and mobilization readiness

The policy is aimed at ensuring mobilisation of pre-trained civilian vessels and crews into the Russian Armed Forces as well as the conduct of maritime activities in wartime. The main priority areas for improving mobilisation training and readiness include improvement of recall system of Russian-flagged vessels during immediate threat and in wartime, measures aimed at increasing the number of ships sailing under the Russian flag.

Sections VIII–X

Section VIII deals with the mechanisms and functions of state management of marine activities, while Section IX contains the procedure for using the instruments of national maritime policy to protect Russian national interests in the World Oceans. In the last Section (X), in the Conclusion, the doctrine states that being the world's largest territory, length of maritime borders, reserves and diversity of natural energy, mineral and biological resources, predetermine Russia's existence and development as a great continental and maritime power and that Russia will firmly and resolutely defend its national interests in the oceans.

Conclusion

Three documents published by Russia provide a perspective on its maritime outlook. These are: *Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations to 2030* (2017), *Strategy for the Development of Russia's Maritime Activities to 2030* (2019)³⁷ and the *Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation* (2022). The new doctrine reveals a more confident and assertive Russia in the maritime domain, and reflects a greater clarity of approach. The inclusion of mobilisation and recall, ramping up shipbuilding capacity to construct aircraft carriers, calling out the US and NATO, and the raising of the strategic importance of Arctic and NSR, suggest an increased possibility of conflict with the West. The omission of China and desire to deepen maritime cooperation with India, including seeking logistic support facilities in the IOR, are welcome opportunities for India. Several synergies with Russia's maritime doctrine exist, as reflected in India's Arctic Policy and Deep Ocean Mission, which provide ample prospects to partner with Russia.

³⁷ Anna Davis and Ryan Vest, "**Strategy for the Development of Maritime Activities of the Russian Federation until 2030**", Russia Maritime Studies Institute, 30 August 2019.

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