Twitter Thread by William Ruger



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If Biden sticks by Trump's U.S.-Taliban withdrawal deal, then he owns very little of the results, some of which won't be immaculate. Post-withdrawal, can talk about "concern" for any events as they unfold, reiterate commitment to hit terrorist groups with intent/capability... 1/

to harm U.S. and its interests, but generally practice benign distancing from internal politics of AFG. Can also say that he was fulfilling Trump's deal and the die was cast, even criticize it (and people like me) as needed for political reasons - but stick to plan knowing... 2/

...that he doesn't want to have to own an endless war he should know will remain a headache for US and a suck on resources better used elsewhere. 3/

4/ But if he reneges on the deal, the conflict becomes Biden's War. Whether based on some "conditions" or a "spirit" of the deal that isn't in the text for all to see, he'd have to make an active choice to return to what we've been doing - and not doing well at - for years.

5/ Then Biden owns the results. This will include continued violence, but this time with US/coalition forces in crosshairs. Deciding to remain won't wave magic wand & make things better than they were before the deal; conditions on ground still only "modicum of success" at best.

6/ Biden will open himself up to both valid criticism & partisan-motivated attacks. Trumpian R's will crush from sidelines just as Bush people attacked Obama over Iraq, but this time it will be "Trump had us on honorable path to end America's longest war; Biden sunk us back in."

7/ Far better to just let the deal play out and then use out of country strike capabilities as needed vs. any AQ/ISIS targets that emerge to signal he/we are serious (just as we ought to anywhere there are terrorists with intent/capability to hit US). Good policy; good politics.

8/ Biden should know it will be harder for uber-hawks in Rep party to hit him & have it stick if he keeps to deal b/c it was a Trump initiative. But he'll disappoint progs and stimulate even greater restraint opposition in R party when it becomes Biden's War.

9/ But unlike early-mid 1990's with Clinton (Somalia) & early 2010's with Obama (Syria), R party restraint that rises in opposition this time is likely to have greater stickiness given changes to nature of party after Trump and institutionalization of realism and restraint in DC.

10/ Plus Afghanistan withdrawal is a 70/30 issue working against Biden. Sure, he could provide (along with other primacists) elite cues that would shift public opinion, but guessing it will be hard to move it significantly absent some shock to rally support. At best, it ...

11/ ...turns for Biden to low simmer issue without much political salience. But that relies on there not being a shock in the other direction....and that could be hard to prevent without increasing troop levels in AFG beyond the 2500 he may keep. As always, enemy gets a vote.

12/ And this assumes that those resources aren't needed or wanted elsewhere.

13/ Caveat: analogies to peacetime Germany, South Korea, etc aren't good ones upon which to support an argument for a permanent troop presence. I've never been shot at or hit with mortars while serving in either of those countries. Won't be case in AFG and FOM will be limited.

14/ Trump's Withdrawal (warts and all) or Biden's War. Which is it going to be Joe?

Coda: if you got this far in the thread, you might also be interested in some of my other recent thoughts on #Afghanistan -

https://t.co/8vrXHVxjMv