Twitter Thread by Kristofer Goldsmith



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Took leave from work to take care of myself (as much as I could, all considered) this week for the first time in as long as I can remember. To see everything I've worked on for years — fighting disinfo and the radicalization of veterans — with death of vets in the Capitol... 1/x

It's been crippling. It's all that I can think about. And I'm angry. Angry at those who didn't listen — particularly those on the Hill who I've been warning for years. Angry at those who avoided responsibility, could have been proactive, and refused to seek solutions. 2/x

After a two-year investigation on behalf of @VVAmerica, I wrote and published a report on the way veterans were being targeted online. My mandate at the time was to focus on foreign entities seeking to take advantage of, defraud, and radicalize troops, vets, and our families. 3/x

I discovered during my investigation that Macedonians stole "Vets for Trump" FB pages, and were using them to spread hateful, racist, and xenophobic rhetoric **MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN THE ORIGINAL OWNERS.** 4/x https://t.co/ufFe6xJB87

As @craigtimberg explained: The saga of Vets for Trump is a case study in how misinfo +political activism can become intertwined, and how the line between domestic and foreign actors can blur in an online world where social media accounts can be bought, sold and even hijacked 5/x

A year prior, @CraigSilverman + team from @BuzzFeed had written about *these same Macedonians,* who stole and ran Vets for Trump, had created an entire publishing industry to prey on Trump followers and feed them crazy conspiracy theories 6/x https://t.co/GE5gACxJeo

The BuzzFeed article ends with how the Macedonians wrote an email to to @tedcruz's office about how Facebook had begun to block their phony pages. Coincidentally, Cruz really leaned into the "conservatives are being targeted by social media" messaging around the same time. 7/x

“I’m the owner of USA Politics Today,” the email began. “The conservative media is under Facebook attack, we are looking for support and help to spread this news everywhere.”

Flash back forward to 2018 and the WaPo article — Craig reveals how Trump-supporting veterans, including one who ran for congress in Texas, had been working with these Macedonians to spread their propaganda, knowingly, for years, motivated in large part by the money. 8/x

In my report, I included dozens of posts made by the Macedonians, who were pretending to be Vets for Trump, posting attacks against and disinfo about 2020 democratic candidates, including, of course, @JoeBiden and @KamalaHarris. 9/x

I included only one piece of content in my report that was posted by the Americans while they controlled the Vets for Trump page. This, featuring @RashidaTlaib, @AOC, @IlhanMN, and @AyannaPressley. Remarkable for a few reasons, not just the obvious insertions in background. 10/x



This post was made in January on the Facebook page Vets for Trump, while American administrators had control of the page. (Screenshot)

The fact-checking sites Snopes identified a meme posted in September 2017 by Vets for Trump as "false" for depicting a black

Remarkable part 1: The original poster of the meme (I’m not sure if it was foreign or domestic in origin) didn’t just insert an ISIS flag, Osama, and Impeach sign. They also played on racist tropes, darkened @IlhanMN’s eyes and teeth. 11/x



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The original source also sharpened @AOC's facial features to make her look menacing, evil. (High res version is available in my report at https://t.co/hcXA6ln9iX) 12/x



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Remarkable part 2: the reactions in the comments. So, so many people who followed the Vets for Trump Facebook page believed this image to be authentic. Hundreds truly believed that Democratic lawmakers are members of ISIS. I'm not being hyperbolic. They truly believe this. 13/x

The post is still up, by the way. I've personally reported it several times. For racism. For xenophobia. For presenting falsified info. For hate speech.

FB at some point labeled it with a "false information" tag. But the damage has been done. 14/x

These are the comments in the order that they appear on my screen when I visit on mobile (may not be the same for you, or on desktop). It takes 3-screens worth of scrolling to reach a skeptical commenter. Others sincerely believe that Americans voted in real ISIS terrorists. 15/x

Comments Done

947



Rita Minner
Wow. The idiocy of the people who voted this terrorist in!!!

1y Like Reply 20



Sheri Basden
The Trojen Horse has been opened !

1y Like Reply 2



Richard Ogle
Just a trojan horse getting started

1y Like Reply 1



Nancy Ellis
this is treasonous to me

1y Like Reply 138



Will Johnson Replied · 6 Replies



Jacque Danley McGuire Switzer
They should not be in our government

1y Like Reply 1



Terry Tate

Write a comment... GIF

Like Comment Share