Twitter Thread by Peter W. Singer

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After all the jokes, my serious take:

By the numbers, no person in all of human history has shared a greater number of conspiracy theories with a greater number of people than Donald Trump did through social media.

This pipeline is now cut off, which is a "really big deal."

For our LikeWar book, I actually read every Trump tweet, going back to his first.

The sheer scale of not just the lies and insults in mindnumbing obviously, but he was also notable for just how many conspiracy theories he fed fire too long before presidency.

It hit topics from well known ones like his birtherism to other ones that are even more despicable now like aiding anti-vaxxers. Indeed, on that last one, my worry was that after Biden came in, he would pivot back to that theme, to stoke anger and bring attention back to himself

We argued in book that the path to making the internet less toxic are the superspreaders. IE, just like in public health, instead of trying to police everyone, focus on those key nodes that effect everyone.

Well, the largest superspreader of proven false conspiracy theories in human history is finally unable to operate in the same way.

Won't conspiracy theory continue though online?
Won't more extreme groups now cluster in smaller, tighter nets? etc. etc. Of course.

But in Clausewitzian terms, they face a whole new type of "friction."

Not just Trump's ban, but the larger policy shift to take into account not just rule-breaking but "impact" (IE, evaluating more its effect on people, which was already shifting in particular as part of CV-19 response) alters the playing field.

Everything in the system, from policies to overall algorithmic design was once tilted in the favor of toxic forces.

Imagine a foosball table game where it was tilted. Yes, the little soccer players could trying to stop each rush of the rolling ball, but overall didn't matter.

Over the past year, company policy change by policy change, that table has started to be righted, driven by outside pressure over elections,cv-19, mass killings and internal employee revolts. Is it long after it could and should of been? Absolutely.

And that's why you see the anger at the firms still, because we know a lot could have been avoided. For me, the crystalizing moment was being told years back they couldn't take the steps on far right extremism that they'd already taken on Islamic extremism. Then...

Then only after several more mass killings, what they said was technically and legally impossible, suddenly was possible.

As another writer put it (I think @cwarzel), its been a bit of "CalvinBall" from Calvin and Hobbes, where they claim there are rules, but also make them up as they go. That's another key source of the anger at the firms among both analysts and the public on this.

But in their defense, that is also understandable. It was a changing (business, technology, and battle) field but making these kind of decisions is not what much of the people in tech firms planned on. They want to build, not police.

So where are we now? Now, they've finally come to the realization that they have a whole new set of responsibilities. I do think, after years of dodging it, they get they are running not just a communications and commerce space, but also a conflict space.

And in that conflict space, by far the most toxic actor just got moved off the board. Again, by the raw numbers, Trump is not just a key node, but literal center of multiple universes of conspiracy theory. And, new policies make it harder for another like him to have same effect

So the events of last few days are going to reverberate well beyond Trump's account or just one topic...

And with that, I should have a coffee to start my day and then tweet rather than vice versa