Twitter Thread by David Henig



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"Fail to prepare, prepare to fail" has gone from being an irritating statement trotted out on a training course to a description of the UK government's modus operandi. And as well as on covid restrictions we're seeing it in EU negotiations - deal or no-deal. And here's why... 1/

The UK's goal in EU negotiations is to declare victory / sovereignty. Sounds good. But the problem is that there will always be winners and losers in a big trade deal, because it covers everything and involves compromising with the other side. An immediate problem. 2/

Take fish, on which apparently talks are stuck. No deal means we regain full control of our waters. Victory! And sell the fish where? EU tariffs and checks. Not victory. So share waters? But then, defeat! Point being, if you don't explain, the result will disappoint. 3/

We don't want the EU setting our rules and regulations. So minimal sovereignty provisions. No-deal and victory! But then what about the car manufacturers no longer viable? Ok, compromise. But then no win on sovereignty, or perhaps call it "freedom clauses"... 4/

Northern Ireland, customs checks, rules of origin, security cooperation and so on... all inevitably to require compromise. But if your game was all about victory and sovereignty, then what? Not make a decision perhaps? 5/

In a way it is the UK dilemma since 2016 writ large. We can't have all the benefits of the single market and none of the costs. But nobody wanted to say that. And we went into these talks with a similar mindset. But more importantly, a similar message. Victory will be ours! 6/

That victory over the EU is currently looking about as good as the victory over Covid, and for more or less the same reasons. No evident planning, poor communication, no preparing people for the realistic outcomes. And for the EU - another party with interests. 7/

The government might get away with it on EU negotiations through boredom and technical detail. After all, no checks on Britain - Northern Ireland trade has become fewer checks for registered traders, without (yet) huge anger. But hardly a win. It could happen with a deal. 8/

But if you've gone from declaring victory to hoping nobody notices the details and still can't decide if that works enough for a deal then you haven't succeeded. And heaven only knows what we could have had if we actually thought about priorities other than "victory"... 9/

In short, infantile simplism politics in a grown up trade-offs world. Want want want as a strategy which must inevitably fail. Listen to anyone who has improbable plans for success, not anyone who points out the flaws. Act surprised when it fails. But you failed to prepare... 10/

How can it not be a failure when you don't know the details for how half of your trade will operate 11 days before it changes? Something no country has ever done before, and I suspect will never do so again. And you don't even know deal or no-deal. The case rests. 11/ end