

# Trump can't blame Mexico



IOAN GRILLO

*This tactic dates back to Nixon and it has always involved a lot of hypocrisy*

After years of covering the drug war in Mexico, after looking down from a helicopter to see burning marijuana fields that soldiers had set aflame and after riding along with federal police as they looked for heroin and cocaine traffickers, I got a very different perspective when I visited Baltimore. On a reporting trip there last year, I accompanied a former drug dealer to one of the so-called open air markets, where marijuana and heroin were hawked in plain view on a busy street. It was a striking paradox. South of the border, I'd watched soldiers torch drugs to destroy them. Here, 40 miles from the White House, I was watching people sell them openly.

That image came to mind early this month, when President Donald J Trump gave Mexico an ultimatum to stop the northward flow of narcotics. "We're

going to give them a one-year warning, and if the drugs don't stop, or largely stop, we're going to put tariffs," he told reporters at the White House. "And if that doesn't stop the drugs, we close the border."

Blaming Mexico for the American drug problem and then coercing it to act is a tactic that dates back to President Richard Nixon. It's pure hypocrisy. While drugs do flow through Mexico, they also flow throughout the United States, feeding one of the biggest drug markets on the planet. If the US government fails to halt the river of narcotics inside its own territory, how can it expect Mexico to succeed?

Of course, there are more factors in the equation. While Mexico's security forces burn opium poppies and shoot traffickers, there are also countless cases of its soldiers, police and politicians working with the criminals. And while you can find open air drug markets in several American cities, the United States arrests millions on drug charges.

But the bottom line is that both nations have utterly failed to stop the trade in the decades

since Nixon declared war on drugs. The Mexican government has spent over a decade waging a military-led crackdown, detaining or killing kingpins in all the major cartels. But this has not reduced trafficking. Over the last five years, seizures of heroin and cocaine on the southern border have fluctuated up and down; seizures of crystal meth have risen, perhaps due to more demand; while seizures of marijuana have plummeted, probably due to the production of legal cannabis in the United States.

The cartel violence, meanwhile, has ravaged Mexico, with over 200,000 murders in the country in the last decade. And despite endless drug cases in its courts, the United States set a tragic record in 2017: 70,000 overdose deaths.

Back in 1969, Nixon launched Operation Intercept to pressure the Mexican government to crack down on the marijuana smugglers of the era. Over a period of several days, almost every vehicle or pedestrian entering over the southern border was searched.

It didn't yield many seizures, as the smugglers waited out



# Athens in pieces: An offering

*A common place modern ritual gave me a deeper*



SIMON CRITCHLEY

It is about time I told you what I have really been doing here the past few months. It hasn't all been visits to archaeological sites and meditations on the contemporary relevance of antiquity. Today I'd like to put ancient history on hold for a moment and move from the past right into the present.

It might be objected that what I have been writing is a series of postcards, perhaps with lots of local colour and historical background, but nonetheless a kind of high-end philosophical tourism from famous Athenian locations. Perhaps this can't be avoided. I am, after all, a foreigner and a temporary resident. And this city's monuments, with their beauty and historical grandeur, exert a pull like virtually no others. But is there perhaps a better way of connecting with ordinary Athenians, with their habits and routines? Maybe I could get closer to their lives in the vast modern Agora of this metropolis through a common passion. A passion for soccer. And what site could be more ordinary than a pub?

I am a lifelong fan of Liverpool Football Club and spend much more time than I care to confess watching games, reading about soccer, listening to podcasts and

watching endless YouTube clips of highlights, news conferences and often rather tedious match analysis. I will talk to any poor soul I can find about my team and about theirs, although I prefer mine. Yet — much to my constant amazement — there exist people in the world who do not care for the beautiful game.

Liverpool were playing the day after I arrived in Athens in early January. I urgently needed to find out where to watch live games because the TV in my apartment was pretty basic. On the morning of match day, I dipped into the internet and discovered a promising-looking Facebook page for "The Pan-Hellenic Liverpool Friends Club." I sent a message, more in hope than expectation.

Three minutes later, I got a reply: "Good morning m8. You can meet us in the Wee Dram pub. It is a Scottish pub. Ask for John."

I got there early and asked for John. It was like meeting a long-lost friend. John Skotidas founded the official Liverpool supporters club in 1995 and has been running it ever since with a good deal of organisational skill. It has 1,100 members, and Liverpool are the most popular English team in Greece. I've gotten to know John quite well in the time I have been here. He was an aircraft engineer with the Greek air force for 27 years, before retiring at age 46 to pursue his other passion, watching and talking about soccer. John even has his own YouTube channel. He became a Liverpool fan after seeing the Beatles on TV when

he was a kid in the late 1960s. He just liked the name "Liverpool." It sounded good. When he was 10 years old, he watched them play for the first time against Newcastle United in the FA Cup final in 1974 and decided to support them. He has been a fan ever since.

I also met a number of other people in the bar on that first day: Scotty, Kris, Spiros (who promotes Bollywood movies in Greece, which are apparently pretty popular) and a bunch of other Greek fans.

I watched my first game with them on Jan 12, Liverpool versus Brighton. It was an edgy match, but with a confident defensive display from us, we won 1-0 ("one-nil").

Since then, I've watched an awful lot of games at the Wee Dram, and it has developed into a ritual of sorts. I have talked a fair bit about the nature of ritual in this series, whether the processional pomp of the City of Dionysia, the Divine Liturgy of Mount Athos or the Greater Mysteries of Eleusis. Watching soccer is an undoubtedly lesser mystery, with a more humble and humdrum set of ritual actions, but they also have meaning. And every fan has their rituals and superstitions.

Before leaving the apartment, I carefully select my Liverpool shirt, track suit or scarf (depending on the weather, but I always look a teensy bit ridiculous) and walk to Syntagma or Constitution Square. I descend into the underworld of the subway system, take the four stops to Panormou station, buy a



The Wee Dram is owned by Ross, who incidentally used to play for the Scottish national basketball team.

piece of spanakopita or sumptuous spinach pie from the bakery, walk slowly uphill eating it, get to the Wee Dram, push open the door, scan the room for seats and look for John. He's always sitting in the same spot (it's a superstition, he told me), just next to the big TV, head down, looking at his phone. Although I always try to get there early, the place is usually packed. John seems to have a secret supply of stools that he will whip out if a regular comes in late and the place is too crammed with fans.

John gives the nod, says a few words, and a seat opens up. I shake hands with everyone, ask them how they are doing, head to the bar, buy a pint of Murphy's (they don't sell Guinness), sit down and check the WhatsApp connection with my son Edward in London. We exchange a couple of short messages like "I'm in position. You?" and then discuss the team lineup and usually wonder why our German coach Juergen Klopp has included or left out a player we particularly like. The Wi-Fi tends to keep dropping, which occasions

much dashing out into the street. The Wee Dram is owned by Ross, who incidentally used to play for the Scottish national basketball team (I didn't know they had one) and supports Hearts of Midlothian. To each their own: the pub has two main areas, a glass-walled central room where you can buy drinks, which is where the younger lads tend to gather, standing together in small groups, often wearing Liverpool shirts, and a larger outside area with older fans, sitting or standing. I prefer to sit, at least until some