Monday, Dec. 16, 2024 / Trump trolls the neighbours

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): Past and future president Donald Trump isn’t being very nice to our neighbors.

<SCORING IN> World 3 - Ocean - BMC

SEAN: He said he’d drop 25 percent tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico on Day 1.

*HALEEMA SHAH (producer): This Tariff will remain in effect until such time as Drugs, in particular FEntanyl and all Illegal Aliens stop this invasion of our Country!*

SEAN: The threat had Canadians saying:

*HALEEMA: How dare you compare us to Mexico!*

SEAN: And had Mexicans saying:

*HALEEMA: Rude, Canada.*

SEAN: But it’s certainly getting everyone’s attention. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took a trip down to Mar-a-Lago to be like, ‘What’s the deal Donald?’ Will it work? Nobody knows. But after he left Trump called Trudeau the “governor” of the “51st State”.

*HALEEMA: Rude, Donald.*

SEAN: We’re gonna ask what the next block party might look like on *Today, Explained*.

<SCORING OUT> World 3 - Ocean - BMC

[THEME]

MARY BETH SHERIDAN (Mexico bureau chief, The Washington Post): I'm Mary Beth Sheridan, bureau chief for the *Washington Post* in Mexico.

SEAN: Mexico's got a new president. The United States has an incoming president. How's that feeling right now in Mexico?

MARY BETH: Definitely a fascinating moment. People are very worried, I would say, because, of course, Trump is coming in very focused on Mexico with threats to impose tariffs. He's even talked about using the U.S. military to go after fentanyl producers.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33UXU_YbeLc)*> 60 MINUTES: MARK ESPER, FORMER US SECRETARY OF DEFENSE: The president pulls me aside on at least a couple occasions and suggests that maybe we have the US military shoot missiles into Mexico.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGLidzI_oGA&t=66s)*> NEWSNATION: PRESIDENT TRUMP: We need a military operation. What's happening? What you're just telling me…we need a military operation. These people have become military.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfaVf_HeeK8)*> PRESIDENT TRUMP: I will deploy all necessary military assets, including the U.S. Navy, to impose the full naval embargo and the cartels. I did that before, and it worked. What we did was incredible.*

MARY BETH: There's just a lot of uncertainty in Mexico and everybody's very focused on what Trump is going to do.

SEAN: Let's just speak about what he's said explicitly. He obviously says a lot, but what has he said since *winning* the election?

MARY BETH: So Trump posted on Truth Social that he would put a 25% tariff on Mexico and Canada if they didn't stop the flow of migrants and fentanyl over the border. So that's pretty much alarmed…well, both countries, I would say. But in Mexico, particularly, Mexico's very dependent on the U.S. market. 80% of Mexico's exports go to the United States. So any measure like that would definitely tip Mexico into a recession. Trump has also talked about possibly using the U.S. military to go after fentanyl producers in Mexico. And Mexicans are very nationalistic. They remember U.S. invasions and they are very worried about that.

*<CLIP> PRESIDENT CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM: (In Spanish) We are a free, independent, sovereign country. There will be good relations with the United States. I’m convinced of that.*

SEAN: When you say use the U.S. military to go after fentanyl producers, whatever it might be, we're talking about bombing Mexico, which we've discussed on the show before.

MARY BETH: You know, it's really unclear what would happen. And I think Trump has intentionally left it a bit unclear. I mean, he's talked about sending the military to the border. People around him have talked about using special forces, possibly bombing fentanyl labs. It's a little unclear both what he would do and whether he would do it with Mexico's permission. By the way, I doubt very much Mexico would give permission for something like that. But that point is left kind of undefined at the moment. So that lack of clarity is something that makes people very nervous.

<SCORING IN> Do your job, do some research

SEAN: Has Mexico done anything yet to address Trump's threats?

MARY BETH: So they've been really eager to sit down with Trump's people, which has not happened yet. Claudia Sheinbaum has spoken. She's the president of Mexico. She's spoken twice to Trump by phone, and both sides have described those conversations in very positive terms. And Sheinbaum is trying to kind of quiet the fears both of Mexicans in Mexico and migrants in the U.S. who are there, you know, unauthorized and could face deportation. She's trying to kind of keep the markets from going crazy and keep people from worrying too much.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRCb7k87T90)*> PRESIDENT CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM: (In Spanish) For our compatriots and their relatives who are here, for Mexican companies and entrepreneurs, there’s no reason to worry.*

MARY BETH: So far, the plans that Mexico has made are very low key. And a lot of the focus has been on Mexicans in the United States who could be some of the primary targets for mass deportations. So Mexico is beefing up the legal staffs at its consulates and things like that.

<SCORING OUT> Do your job, do some research

SEAN: Do we know how Mexico’s new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, feels about our past and future president, Donald Trump?

MARY BETH: Her predecessor, Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, who left office at the end of September, had managed to create a pretty good relationship with Trump, to everybody's surprise.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RydXtRpEKNE)*> PRESIDENT TRUMP: We've had a great relationship right from the beginning, and I think that, maybe, was against all odds. A lot of people were betting against it, but they've learned not to bet against us, I suspect. I know they've learned that in Mexico.*

MARY BETH: Lopez Obrador is a leftist, a nationalist, and Lopez Obrador gave in to Trump's demands on curbing migration. And in exchange, Trump kind of left him alone on a lot of other fronts. So the question is, Claudia Sheinbaum is the new president. She is definitely a leftist. She's the protege of Lopez Obrador. But she's a different personality. She's a scientist, much less charismatic, obviously female. And there's been a lot of questions about whether she will be able to establish the bond that Lopez Obrador had with Trump.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67dS7ngBwOY)*> PRESIDENT ANDRES MANUEL LOPEZ OBRADOR: Instead of distancing ourselves, we are deciding…we're opting to work together towards the future. We want to privilege understanding.*

MARY BETH: You know, Lopez Obrador and Trump in part had this respect because each saw the other as the head of a movement. Claudia Sheinbaum won with a commanding majority in the elections last June, but she kind of rode on the coattails of Lopez Obrador. So she may not have quite the same stature. So far, they've, they've both said their conversations were very positive. So we'll see what happens.

SEAN: Do we have any sense of who she wanted to win the presidential election in the United States?

MARY BETH: Oh, she was so careful about not expressing any preference because I think she understands Mexico needs to have a good relationship with the United States. In particular, the economies are so intertwined, so many Mexican jobs depend on the exports to the United States. So she didn't want to do anything that would get her off on the wrong foot with the new president.

<SCORING IN> New tension 08 infinite whack-a-mole

MARY BETH: If you look carefully at what's been going on, Mexico has become just a crucial ally for the U.S. in stopping migration. So under President Biden in particular, in the past year, the Biden administration leaned on Mexico migrant arrivals at the border. The detentions by the U.S. Border Patrol had reached a historic high in December, and the Biden people came down and really had a tough talk with the Mexicans, and Mexico cracked down in a huge way. They have done about a million detentions since then, and the number of people being migrants being detained at the U.S. border has dropped by 75%. So Mexico has a crucial role to play in terms of being able to stop migrants. The other thing I would mention is that the U.S., both consumers and U.S. business, depend tremendously on things made in Mexico, everything from, you know, fruits and vegetables to cars to Oreo cookies. I mean, the two countries are very…the economies are interwoven.

SEAN: Even our Oreo cookies! I didn't even know that. <laughs>

MARY BETH: You bet. Cheez-Its. All kinds of snack foods. Yeah, they're made in both countries now. And stuff goes back and forth. Think about Oreo cookies are made using U.S. wheat. Mexican beer is made using barley from Idaho and Montana.  
  
SEAN: Hm!  
  
MARY BETH: Trump has talked about these 25% tariffs that he could put on Mexico and Canada because of migration and drugs. But those would wind up having a real boomerang effect for American consumers and for the American companies that rely on Mexican parts for, you know, auto factories in Detroit or airplane factories in the U.S. and so on.

<SCORING OUT> New tension 08 infinite whack-a-mole

SEAN: Tell us a bit more about the boomerang effect. What could the U.S. economy look like if Trump went ahead and imposed 25% tariffs? What could the relationship with Mexico look like if Trump sort of, I don't know, unilaterally decided to start bombing drug production sites in the country?

MARY BETH: So I do think that consumers could feel this very quickly in the U.S. For example, the Mexican government has calculated that pickup trucks sold in the U.S. could be $3,000 more expensive with these tariffs.

SEAN: Hm.

MARY BETH: …Because a lot of the pickups and/or the parts are made in Mexico. You look at stuff like agriculture, you know, in the winter, the berries that are in American supermarkets come from Mexico largely. Mexico has a longer growing season. And in a lot of cases, they're actually grown either by American companies sometimes or in sort of joint venture type arrangements. Right. Think about during the pandemic, when Mexico closed some of its factories, the Pentagon got all worried because the parts for the airplanes that the defense contractors build for the U.S. Army and Navy, they weren't coming. They couldn't build those planes. That's the kind of commercial side. I think, on the drug side, you know, Mexico's a very proud, very nationalistic country and the public would not tolerate any kind of U.S. unilateral military action. I think that would be…that would really destroy the relationship. And it would be pretty chaotic for both countries, particularly in their economies, I would say.

SEAN: <laughs> It's funny: this trade fight he's trying to pick with Mexico and Canada at the same time, if I'm not mistaken, it's kind of pitted Mexico against Canada a little bit?

MARY BETH: Oh, the Mexicans have been pretty horrified that, you know, the headlines have been ‘Canada's throwing us under the bus!’ And what happened is, well, the Canadians, on the one hand, are worried about the possibility that Mexico could be sort of a back door for Chinese cars and auto parts and so on that would come in. And the Canadians are saying the Mexicans aren't being as tough on China as we are. Now the Mexicans say, hey, China's still a pretty small exporter to Mexico and there's not a lot of evidence, the Mexicans say, that there is some kind of backdoor thing going on.

<SCORING IN> Richard goes skating

MARY BETH: Canada is heading into its own elections pretty soon. So the theme of trade has emerged, particularly on the provincial level, where some officials who, at least in the Mexican vision, are trying to make hay out of this issue. But the Canadian government has gone so far as to say, well, ‘let's just leave Mexico out of the North American Free Trade Agreement,’ you know? And the Mexicans are not amused at all.

SEAN: <laughs> It's so funny. It's like one friend’s fighting with two friends and then the two friends start fighting with each other, too.

MARY BETH: Yeah, I think it is very much seen as an effort by Canada to strengthen its hand with Trump, but it's hard to imagine that it will work.

SCORING BUMP  
  
SEAN: Mary Beth Sheridan. She covers Mexico from Mexico City for Washington Post punto com. We’re gonna talk about the Canada of it all when we’re back on *Today, Explained*.

<SCORING OUT> Richard goes skating

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

SEAN: *Today, Explained* is back. We mulled Mexico. Now it’s time to crow about Canada. To do so, we reached out to Caileigh Glenn at Duke University. She’s been following the threats, the tariffs, the tumult.

CAILEIGH: Prime Minister Trudeau himself took a trip to Mar-a-Lago to meet with President-elect Trump in a way that received some mixed reviews in Canada, at least. Some saw this as a potential strategy for a leader who knows how to deal with president like Trump. Meeting him on his home turf, figuring out how there might be a way to dampen the tariff rhetoric. But on the other hand, Trump is not yet president. And so there are folks who have been critical about Trudeau's apparent deference to the incoming president. We're also seeing provincial leaders and regional leaders responding to these threats of tariffs. So Ontario Premier Doug Ford, for instance, has recently threatened to enact sort of province wide retaliatory measures in the form of cutting off Ontario's energy supply to specific United States if the tariffs are imposed on Canadian goods.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8f3AvuZFR0)*> PREMIER DOUG FORD: We will go to the extent of cutting off their energy, going down to Michigan, going down to New York State and over to Wisconsin…*

CAILEIGH: And this is not exactly [a] weak threat. Ontario's energy supply to the United States amounts for providing over 1 million homes with their electricity, and this would have regional impacts within the United States, particularly in states like Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, which all account for large dollar amounts in large quantities of trade with with Canada and with Ontario specifically. What's also interesting is that Ontario Premier Doug Ford has mentioned that he is planning on meeting with other provincial premiers in Canada to sort of coordinate a potential response across the provinces to any sort of tariffs that are imposed by the United States.

SEAN: Trump got a chance to sort of rearrange the relationships between Canada and Mexico in his first administration, and he took it! How did that go over?

CAILEIGH: In Trump's first term as U.S. president, he went ahead and threatened to impose tariffs on Canadian and Mexican products and actually went ahead and did impose them. But what happened in Trump's first term was that Canada and Mexico retaliated. Canada imposed reciprocal tariffs on steel and aluminum products that remained in place until NAFTA was renegotiated to become the USMCA.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iqx0jE7liXI)*> PRESIDENT TRUMP: I will say that we just ended a nightmare known as NAFTA.*

*<crowd cheers>*

*TRUMP: They took our…they took our jobs for a long time. They took it for a long time. And we now have a brand new U.S.. Mexico-canada agreement. It's a whole different ballgame.*

CAILEIGH: The renegotiated NAFTA into the USMCA was widely perceived to have included terms that were viewed as quite preferable for the United States.

SEAN: Hm. But now Trump is coming out before he's even in office, barking at Canada and Mexico and threatening 25% tariffs. Does that mean he didn't quite get it right the first time?

CAILEIGH: I think what this means is that the goals of what a second term Trump administration is trying to achieve really matter here. Candidate Trump mentioned the U.S. trade deficit with Mexico and specifically mentioned that the border between U.S. and Canada and the border between U.S. and Mexico is a key issue that he signaled he might use tariffs to address. So if the goals of the tariffs are, in fact, security in nature, it's not entirely clear how tariffs would bring about desired policy change, given that Canada and Mexican leaders have already signaled they want to take action on the border. So that is to say, there's already room for cooperation and there might not be, necessarily, a need for the pressure levied by tariffs.

<SCORING IN> Luke takes a train

SEAN: I think when people think about the, the border between the United States and Mexico, they think about migrants. But when people think about the border between the United States and Canada, they think about, like, Niagara Falls.

CAILEIGH: <chuckle>

SEAN: What is Trump mad about regarding the 49th parallel?

CAILEIGH: There still remain irregular migrant crossings at unofficial entry points between Canada and the United States. And Prime Minister Trudeau, alongside President Biden, coordinated the implementation of what's called the Safe Third Country Agreement to specifically address these irregular migrant crossings.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQ2oYZmk34E)*> GLOBAL NEWS: TOURIA IZRI, REPORTER: This once busy crossing between Quebec and New York is now quiet. The Canadian government closed the door to Roxham Road by extending something known as the Safe Third Country Agreement.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFTUUCXKUXw)*> CTV: VASSY KAPELOS, ANCHOR: Under the agreement, asylum seekers arriving by land at official crossings are turned away and handed back to American authorities.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCAK7rO2pQM)*> ABC NEWS: JUSTIN TRUDEAU, CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER: So after midnight tonight, police and border officers will enforce the agreement and return irregular border crossers to the closest port of entry with the United States.*

CAILEIGH: So there's, there's already been movement on the policy side between Canada and the United States to address things like irregular migrant crossings. Beyond that, it's not entirely clear what, what might be addressed in any sort of future policy move beyond what Canada and the United States have signaled they already want to do.

<SCORING OUT> Luke takes a train

SEAN: Trump loves to walk in and shake stuff up, right? He's a norm buster, a precedent setter, a precedent breaker. Is that what he's doing here with, with Canada and Mexico just before he even takes office? Scaring the living daylights out of everyone about tariffs and borders and bombings even?

CAILEIGH: I mean, that's certainly possible. We, we sort of got a taste of Trump's foreign policy approach during his first term in which he dealt with traditional allies of the United States in ways similar to how the United States has treated its traditional adversaries—with big threats and and sort of harsh rhetoric for perceptions of unfairness. So, in a way, yes. President Trump in his first term was president breaking in terms of how he spoke about and how he handled allies. For instance, in his first administration, he considered Canada to be a national security threat and therefore justifying the imposition of the tariffs that we saw in 2018. I can't recall a time when the United States had considered Canada to be a national security threat to that degree after 1812.

SEAN: Mm. After the war. <laughs>

CAILEIGH: Correct, yes. I mean, Canada has been a security ally across many different formalized alliances with the United States. So it's not out of Trump's precedent, but it is out of U.S. precedent.

<SCORING IN> Drunk little fool APM

SEAN: Caileigh Glenn is a postdoctoral fellow at the American Grand Strategy program. If that sounds like your kind of program, you can find it at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Go Blue Devils? Or, as I’m told, perhaps go back to hell, ye Devils? I’m Sean Rameswaram and I really don’t want to get involved.

Our show today was produced by Haleema Shah, edited by Matthew Collette, fact checked by North Carolinian Laura Bullard and Victoria Chamberlin and mixed by Andrea Kritinsdottir and North Carolinian Patrick Boyd.

This is *Today, Explained*.

<SCORING OUT> Drunk little fool APM

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]