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Six months ago my cousin and I started to make plans for me to visit in March 2024 and, from Germany, make a detour into Switzerland. Since then I have emailed my itineraries to friends and extended family, realizing I'd soon be facing their questions about the possibility of a recurring Trump presidency. Since US policies materially affect Europeans, they worry about Trump in the Oval Office again. What do I tell them?

In Iowa, two-thirds of caucus-goers said President Biden didn't legitimately win the 2020 election; about 6 in 10 said they would consider Trump fit to serve as president even if he was convicted of a crime. As the 2024 election year gets underway, Republicans seem more loyal to the January 6 insurrectionists and the "admitted dictator" Donald Trump than they were three years ago. Given that Trump is facing 91 criminal charges and tried to stay in power after losing the last election, you'd think Americans would agree, as they did during the insurrectionists' ransacking of the Capitol, that January 6 was an attack on democracy. The opposite has happened.

Questions from abroad came sooner than I thought, via email and phone calls, triggered by the Iowa caucus.

"He'll abandon us on Ukraine. He'll let Putin take it all," reads one email.

The fate of Ukraine weighs heavily on Europeans. When the Russians invaded, about a million women and children fled to Poland and from there, to Germany and France. They wish nothing more urgently than to return to their country, to reunite with husbands, fathers, brothers and cousins who have been fighting the invaders, often in bitter cold. However, the refugee crisis that began in late February 2022 is ongoing. Nearly 6 million Ukrainian refugees are recorded across Europe, while an estimated 8 million others had been displaced within the country by late May 2022.

Refugees need food and water; healthcare, schooling, and a roof over their heads. In densely populated Europe, sheltering the huge numbers of Ukrainian refugees strains the budgets, particularly since, a few years earlier, the countries were inundated with people fleeing wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen—several of these wars, my readers remind me, were instigated by American presidents, with weapons manufacturers hawking their wares to one or the other (or both sides) of the warring factions.

Further, my German friends are still infuriated that, as President, Donald Trump claimed US COVID-19 deaths were on par with Germany's.

"Trump said in May 2020, 'Germany and the United States are the two best in deaths per

100,000 people.’ I kept the newspaper that quoted him,” a friend emailed. “It was during a Rose Garden press briefing,”

“It’s a lie,” I replied. “FactCheck reported, as of May 11, 2020, the U.S. had 24.66 deaths per 100,000, more than twice that of Germany’s 9.24 deaths per 100,000. Altogether, the US lost the lives of over a million.”

I flashed back to the time when Trump declared hydroxychloroquine a “game changer” and stockpiled millions of pills even after the FDA warned consumers not to use it. From there he went to the horse dewormer ivermectin, which led to a run on farm supply stores. Then he advanced the notion of injecting or consuming disinfectants as a preventative or cure for COVID-19. More than a few in his TV audience heeded him: Poison Centers reported twice the traffic normal for that time of year. It made me think of the Jonestown suicide massacre of the members of a religious cult who willingly imbibed the poison their leader handed them: they had “practiced” the death ritual beforehand, even learning how to get it into their children’s mouths. Where does “cult” end and culture begin?

While folks overseas fret over Trump’s stance on Ukraine and his record on COVID-19 (which is staging a comeback with a speedier variant), my American friends are worried about his views on presidentially ordered assassinations.

“A reporter recently asked if he agreed that, as President, he could not be prosecuted if he ordered Seal Team 6 to assassinate a political opponent,” an email reminded me. “Trump responded, ‘A President has to have immunity.’ This is the most grave of all the dangerous things he has put forth, and there’ve been many, including the remarks that incited the January 6 insurrection. The most dangerous. The most treacherous.”

On another note, I don’t play golf but my neighbor does. He directed me to several YouTube videos of Sportswriter Rick Reilly, author of “Commander in Cheat,” a book that details how Trump lies and cheats his way through assorted golf games.

Golf explains life and reveals character, contends Reilly, who has known the former president for thirty years. When he wrote for Sports Illustrated, Trump called him “my favorite writer,” but being with Trump was “like spending the day in a hyperbole hurricane,” writes the author. Trump would introduce Reilly to friends as “Editor of Sports Illustrated.” Next time it was “Publisher of Sports Illustrated.”

One of Reilly’s tidbits reveals that a large percentage of Trump’s caustic tweets came from someone who started as his caddy.

Trump lies compulsively about his handicap. He cheats with his shots—they make their way from the rough or the water onto the fairway, thanks to Trump’s pockets full of balls, his highspeed cart, and a willing caddy. He lies about the quality of the golf courses he owns, about their profitability, and about how much he plays. During his presidency he claimed to be “on a pace to play almost triple the amount of golf Obama played,” though he used to criticize his predecessor for playing too often. He cheats on his score and his putts.

In the video, Reilly is asked about Bill Clinton cheating in golf.

“Yeah, he cheats,” answered the acknowledged pro. “But the comparison isn’t there. It’s like taking a pen from a bank versus making off with the vault.”

"You can think Trump has made America hate again. But there's one thing I know: He's made golf terrible again," Reilly says. For someone who takes golf far more seriously than politics, making golf terrible is the worst.

Few golfers complain as they watch being cheated. When they do, Trump waves it off. According to Reilly, Trump has worked out a stock reply he’s heard him use on four different occasions:

“I cheat on my wives. I cheat on my taxes. Why would I not cheat in golf?”

‘Nuf said. I’m packing my bags. I’ll visit family in California for most of February and fly to Frankfurt from San Francisco.