

March 24, 2014

Victor Davis Hanson knows why weaker nations like Russia thumb their noses at stronger states like the US.

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Putin added all that up. He saw a pattern of words without consequences, of actions that are ephemeral and not sustained, and so he concluded that a weaker power like Russia most certainly can bully a neighbor with access to stronger powers like the United States. For Putin and his ilk, willpower and his mythologies about Russian moral superiority are worth more than the hardware and data points of the West. ...

Jennifer Rubin wonders why NCAA Brackets are more important than serial disasters in foreign policy.

Other than finger-wagging, the administration seems to be doing precious little in the wake of the invasion and annexation of Crimea. Vice President Biden was sent to Eastern Europe to make platitudinous promises of mutual defense. He says, "I want to make it clear: We stand resolutely with our Baltic allies in support of the Ukrainian people and against Russian aggression. As long as

Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing political and economic isolation.” What does that even mean at this stage? The administration is not arming Ukraine to protect it from further aggression, it has yet to kick Russia out of international institutions and has made no move to flood the European market with liquefied natural gas, which would be reassuring to allies and undermine Russia’s economy.

Biden was not alone in the empty-rhetoric sweepstakes. The New York Times reports, “The NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said on Wednesday that Russia’s military intervention was the ‘gravest threat’ to European security since the end of the Cold War. ‘This is a wake-up call, for the Euro-Atlantic community, for NATO and for all those committed to a Europe whole, free and at peace,’ Mr. Rasmussen said in a speech at the Brookings Institution on Wednesday afternoon.” But has President Obama woken up — this happened on his watch, after all — or is he busying himself with his NCAA Tournament bracket, Obamacare and saving the Senate? ...

Peter Wehner posts on the president's world of make believe.

For anyone who has observed Barack Obama over the years, it’s obvious that a fundamental part of his self-identity involves seeing himself, and having others see him, as pragmatic rather than ideological, reality-based, driven by reason instead of bias.

This has never actually been true. Mr. Obama is, in fact, unusually dogmatic, blind to counter-evidence, and mostly unable to adjust his views to the way things are. So when his worldview collides with reality, he often can’t adjust. He instead creates his own make believe world.

We’ve seen it time and time again with the Affordable Care Act. (Earlier this month the president declared, ObamaCare “is working the way it should.” He may be the only person in America who believes such a thing.) We’ve also seen this in Mr. Obama’s dealings with Vladimir Putin, who with lightning speed has seized Crimea, threatens Ukraine, and whose top officials are now openly mocking the president (including with tweets ending with smiley faces). Yet President Obama insists that Putin is acting “out of weakness, not out of strength” in attempting to take control of Crimea. This is an effort to seek comfort by engaging in an almost clinical level of delusion. And it’s not isolated to Mr. Obama.

As Russia began its aggression against Crimea, Secretary of State John Kerry said, “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pretext.” Except that Russia did exactly that. Earlier this week Mr. Kerry said Putin’s speech announcing the Crimean annexation “just didn’t jibe with reality.” But the reality is that Crimea is once again part of Russia. ...

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Unfortunately, the affirmative action she contemplates is affirmative action in the legal sense — affirmative action on behalf of women.

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If true, this report is a perfect demonstration of Team Obama’s lack of seriousness. While Eastern Europe worries about the emergence of a Russian empire, Susan Rice worries about doling out jobs to women.

It may be, of course, that the best candidate for brutally difficult job of “our man in Moscow” is a woman. But to inject consideration of gender into the selection process — which is what I take Kamen to be reporting — is to reduce the odds of selecting the best candidate.

It could be worse, though. Last week it was rumored that White House press secretary Jay Carney, who once worked in Moscow for Time Magazine, wanted the job. In what universe does unsuccessful sparring with the White House press corps qualify someone to spar with the Russian bear?

Still, I concede that it probably doesn’t make much difference who becomes the new ambassador to Russia. Obama, assisted by John Kerry and Susan Rice, will set our Russia policy. And they will set it with the same lack of seriousness that lends plausibility to reports that Rice wants to make an affirmative action pick for the post of ambassador.

Long an also ran in the ACC, UVA Men's Basketball is having quite a season. [NY times reports](#) on the team that plays tonight at 8:40 in the third round of the NCAA tournament.

If Ralph Sampson raised Virginia’s national profile and gave the men’s basketball program its identity in the 1980s, he remains the towering measure of every team that has come through Charlottesville since.

Yet in all the years after the Sampson era, which ended in 1983, few Virginia teams have come close to matching that success. Until now.

The Cavaliers, coming off their first Atlantic Coast Conference tournament title since 1976, enter the N.C.A.A. tournament as the No. 1 seed in the East Region. Virginia will face No. 16 Coastal Carolina on Friday in Raleigh, N.C. ...

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Not that Virginia is in that category quite yet.

“U.N.C. and Duke are the two blue bloods in the conference,” Brogdon said. “We should be one, but we’re not. We’re not looked as one right now. But we’re getting there.”

And for now, that is enough for longtime fans who have waited decades to see Virginia become a factor in the A.C.C. and the N.C.A.A. tournament again. ...

Hoover Institution

The Hitler Model

by Victor Davis Hanson

Why do weak nations like Russia provoke stronger ones like the United States?

An ascendant Vladimir Putin is dismantling the Ukraine and absorbing its eastern territory in the Crimea. President Obama is fighting back against critics that his administration serially projected weakness, and thereby lost the ability to deter rogue regimes. Obama, of course, rejects the notion that his own mixed signals have emboldened Putin to try something stupid that he might otherwise not have. After all, in terms of planes, ships, soldiers, nuclear strength, and economic clout, Putin must concede that he has only a fraction of the strength of what is at the disposal of the United States.

In the recriminations that have followed Putin's daring intervention, Team Obama has also assured the international community that Putin is committing strategic suicide, given the gap between his ambitions of expanding the Russian Federation by threats of force and intimidation, and the rather limited means to do so at his disposal. Perhaps Putin is pandering to Russian public opinion or simply delusional in his wildly wrong calculations of all the bad things that may befall him.

Do any of those rationalizations matter—given that Putin, in fact, did intervene, plans to stay in the eastern Ukraine, and has put other former member states of the former Soviet Union on implicit notice that their future behavior may determine whether they too are similarly absorbed?

History is replete with examples of demonstrably weaker states invading or intervening in other countries that could in theory or in time bring to their defense far greater resources. On September 1, 1939, Hitler was both militarily and economically weaker than France and Britain combined. So what? That fact certainly did not stop the Wehrmacht over the next eight months from invading, defeating, and occupying seven countries in a row.

Hitler was far weaker than the Soviet Union. Still, he foolishly destroyed his non-aggression pact with Stalin to invade Russia on June 22, 1941. Next, Nazi Germany, when bogged down outside Moscow and having suffered almost a million casualties in the first six months of Operation Barbarossa, certainly was weaker than the United States, when Hitler idiotically declared war on America on December 11, 1941.

Yet all those demonstrably stupid moves did not prove that Hitler himself agreed that that he was weaker than his targets. Much less did Nazi Germany have any good reason from recent experiences to accept the fact that it was weaker than were its enemies. Even Neville Chamberlain did not claim that Hitler had invaded Poland because he was weaker than France and Britain—though again he probably was.

From Benito Mussolini's invasions in 1940-41 of France, the Balkans, and Greece to Argentine Gen. Galtieri's attack on the Falklands in 1982 and Saddam Hussein's entry into Kuwait in the summer of 1990, there are plenty of examples of weak states attacking countries who have alliances or friends far stronger than the attacker. Why then do the Putins of the past and present try something so shortsighted—as the Obama administration has characterized the Ukraine gambit?

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To return to our previous topic: Hitler finally went into Poland and Western Europe because he believed that even if his opponents collectively were stronger, there was no evidence in the immediate past—in the Rhineland, during the Anschluss, or amid the Czechoslovakia annexations—that they would either act individually or in concert to stop his aggression. The Nazis' cynical pact with the Soviet Union secured his eastern front, and cemented the impression that he could beat all of Western Europe—whose aggregate planes, tanks, artillery, and armies were nevertheless greater than Germany's.

Hitler invaded a far stronger Soviet Union because he was convinced that its purges of high-ranking officers, that its recent lackluster military performance in Finland and Poland in 1939, that the unstoppable record theretofore of Blitzkrieg in 1930-40, and that the collapse of Russia in 1917, all suggested Russia's greater relative strength was now a chimera.

Similar reasoning led Hitler to declare war on the United States. In the abstract, Hitler knew that during World War I, in just over a year, an earlier, weaker America had sent well over 1 million soldiers to Europe to stop the Kaiser's spring offensive of 1918, and eventually overwhelmed Imperial Germany with its industrial output. But Hitler also figured that a different U.S. had stood idly by in 1940 while Britain, its closet ally, burned, that it would have its hands full with a two-front war against the Japanese navy, and that prior U.S. isolationism meant that it would not rally to war as it had in 1917. Above all, Hitler did not just rely on relative material strength, but believed the iron will of Nazi ideology could make up the divisions he lacked on the Eastern front or in the war with America. And so he did something fundamentally stupid in declaring war on a much stronger U.S.

The Argentines in 1982 dared the naval successors to Lord Nelson to fight by sea, on the silly idea that Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first female Prime Minister, lacked the machismo to protect some far off windswept rocks in the south Atlantic. The junta in Argentina remembered that some prominent British politicians had parroted the Argentine name "Malvinas" for the Falkland's, and that the reset faction in Britain had earlier withdrawn a few unimpressive warships from the Falkland's. In the junta's view, a far stronger Britain was too smug and too sophisticated to worry about loud noise emanating from a caricatured two-bit dictatorship in Buenos Aires, pandering to the public to hide its own domestic incompetency. Once again, a dictator counted on supposed willpower and superior morale to substitute for the material strength he lacked.

Ditto Saddam Hussein in August 1990. He did not need Kuwait's oil. Taking it might likely ensure a coalition of far stronger and wealthier powers arrayed against him. But such a short-sighted move did not appear so short-sighted to Saddam as he ordered his tanks into Kuwait City. Saddam figured that the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, had casually assured him that border disputes among Arab states were not of much interest to Washington. Saddam assumed that the eroding Soviet Union might still have enough clout to back his gamble. He reasoned that no one had cared when he had invaded Iran or gassed the Kurds, so why would they care now? He thought the opulent Persian Gulf States were softies compared to his Republican Guard who had died in droves in Iran. And George H.W. Bush was an unknown quantity.

Deterrence is an art, not a science. And it is transitory, often psychological, and as easily lost as it is hard to regain. Weak states invade others with strong backers because they are not deterred and feel they can get away with it—and thereby become stronger by their sheer success. If they fail, it is usually because they or their intended targets had originally misjudged relative power. Some sort of hostilities then ensue to correct those inaccurate initial appraisals. Peace follows when everybody again knows who was truly weak and who was strong in the first place.

When Putin clearly learns that the United States was all along the stronger power, and remains the far stronger power, and that Russia, for all its blather about the greater will and spirit, was and remains the weaker party, he will be deterred and recede. Then calm will return.

In contrast, if Putin continues to meddle in Ukraine and meets no consequences, then he was probably correct that for all the impressive military force of the United States, for all its economic power, for all its global influence and array of international allies, it really is retreating from the international stage.

In some sense, Putin defines power not by tanks or GDP, but by a state's willingness to gamble to use whatever power it has. He assumes that others less reckless than he would rather rationalize their unwillingness to use their superior economic and military assets than run the risks of

employing them. For an aggressive but weaker belligerent, its sheer audacity, indeed its recklessness is seen as a force multiplier—an unfathomable asset that sometimes makes up the difference in what is lacking in bombers or cash. By that standard, a weak Putin believes that he's strong and assumes anyone more powerful who disagrees will not prove it. It is up to others to disabuse him of that folly.

Right Turn

Obama: More talk, no action on Russia

by Jennifer Rubin

Other than finger-wagging, the administration seems to be doing precious little in the wake of the invasion and annexation of Crimea. Vice President Biden was sent to Eastern Europe to make platitudinous promises of mutual defense. He says, "I want to make it clear: We stand resolutely with our Baltic allies in support of the Ukrainian people and against Russian aggression. As long as Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing political and economic isolation." What does that even mean at this stage? The administration is not arming Ukraine to protect it from further aggression, it has yet to kick Russia out of international institutions and has made no move to flood the European market with liquefied natural gas, which would be reassuring to allies and undermine Russia's economy.

Biden was not alone in the empty-rhetoric sweepstakes. The New York Times reports, "The NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said on Wednesday that Russia's military intervention was the 'gravest threat' to European security since the end of the Cold War. 'This is a wake-up call, for the Euro-Atlantic community, for NATO and for all those committed to a Europe whole, free and at peace,' Mr. Rasmussen said in a speech at the Brookings Institution on Wednesday afternoon." But has President Obama woken up — this happened on his watch, after all — or is he busying himself with his NCAA Tournament bracket, Obamacare and saving the Senate?

Biden promised that the United States would come to the aid of Baltic countries under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, but then we had an agreement to protect Ukraine as well. (The Budapest Memorandum will become the answer to a trivia question one day.) There is no catch phrase ("A nuclear Iran is unacceptable," "We have Israel's back," "Bashar al-Assad must go") that has meaning any longer, not with this president.

The State Department spokesperson sounded like a parody of a State Department spokesperson: "Obviously, there are a range of options under consideration. I'm not going to get into what we are or aren't considering. You saw seven government officials sanctioned just a couple of days ago. The question at this point is not if we will do more sanctions; it's when." How about *now*?

The irony is that Obama has destroyed just about every liberal nostrum in the left-wing, anti-Bush playbook. "Multilateralism" is an empty promise, the Ukrainians found out. "Smart power" or "soft power" has not been employed to push back on Russia, to press Arab countries toward democracy or to adhere to Iran sanctions (which the administration grudgingly signed onto in the past and now flat-out opposes). Nonproliferation? Tell that to the Persian Gulf countries that watch Iran get closer to a nuclear capability and Assad suffer no adverse consequences from use of WMDs.

Anyone want to follow Ukraine, which in 1994 gave up its nukes in exchange for promises of its independence and geographic integrity?

U.S. power — soft, hard and in between — and the will to use it in defense of U.S. interests are indispensable to our continued security and that of our allies. There is no respite from history or end of wars. Unlike former president Jimmy Carter, Obama doesn't seem to have recognized anything is amiss even after the invasion of a sovereign country.

Members of Congress are not powerless, and if the GOP takes the Senate (and thereby is no longer hampered by Sen. Harry Reid) it can do a great deal to strengthen the United States' hand. It can pass sanctions against Iran. It can revisit our defense budget and offer to reinstall missile defense systems in Eastern Europe. It can pass legislation to use our domestic energy supply strategically to become energy self-sufficient, provide economic protection to allies and do damage to aggressive states such as Russia. It can provide appropriate levels of financial support to besieged allies. Would the president veto such measures? Perhaps. But frankly, if he loses the Senate and the international scene continues to deteriorate even Democrats may override him, for the sake of their own careers and for the country's national security. The president is bereft of ideas and of will; others will need to step forward.

Contentions

Obama's World of Make Believe

by Peter Wehner

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This has never actually been true. Mr. Obama is, in fact, unusually dogmatic, blind to counter-evidence, and mostly unable to adjust his views to the way things are. So when his worldview collides with reality, he often can't adjust. He instead creates his own make believe world.

We've seen it time and time again with the Affordable Care Act. (Earlier this month the president declared, ObamaCare "is working the way it should." He may be the only person in America who believes such a thing.) We've also seen this in Mr. Obama's dealings with Vladimir Putin, who with lightning speed has seized Crimea, threatens Ukraine, and whose top officials are now openly mocking the president (including with tweets ending with smiley faces). Yet President Obama insists that Putin is acting "out of weakness, not out of strength" in attempting to take control of Crimea. This is an effort to seek comfort by engaging in an almost clinical level of delusion. And it's not isolated to Mr. Obama.

As Russia began its aggression against Crimea, Secretary of State John Kerry said, "You just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pretext." Except that Russia did exactly that. Earlier this week Mr. Kerry said Putin's speech announcing the Crimean annexation "just didn't jibe with reality." But the reality is that Crimea is once again part of Russia.

The president puts in place sanctions that are so farcically weak that it would have been better to remain silent and do nothing rather than huff and puff and do as little as he has. (In response to the announcement of sanctions, the Russian stock market actually rose.)

Mr. Putin, meanwhile, is in the process of restoring the Russian empire. He is besting Mr. Obama at every turn, from arms control agreements to Crimea and Ukraine to Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Russia has established a major presence in the Middle East for the first time since the 1970s. Early in his presidency President Obama canceled a missile defense agreement with Poland and the Czech Republic—and got nothing in return from Putin. Our adversaries are emboldened; our allies are afraid. Confidence in America is collapsing.

Yet the president seems clueless to all this; his failures don't seem to compute with him. Even Jimmy Carter eventually understood the errors of his ways and adjusted his dealings with the Soviet Union. Mr. Obama remains off in his own world.

In psychiatry, there's a condition known as dissociative disorder. It's considered to be a coping mechanism, when the person literally dissociates himself from a situation or experience too traumatic to integrate with his conscious self. A person escapes reality in ways that are unhealthy.

That pretty well sums up the Obama foreign policy. He cannot understand how someone as brutish, crude, aggressive and chauvinistic as Vladimir Putin is acting as he is. The fact that in the process Mr. Obama is being humiliated is simply too much for him to bear. And so he's created a fantasy world where disengagement translates into influence and we're strong and Putin is weak.

For Barack Obama, the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust.

Power Line

[Report: Susan Rice wants affirmative action towards Russia](#)

by Paul Mirengoff

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Unfortunately, the affirmative action she contemplates is affirmative action in the legal sense — affirmative action on behalf of women.

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If true, this report is a perfect demonstration of Team Obama's lack of seriousness. While Eastern Europe worries about the emergence of a Russian empire, Susan Rice worries about doling out jobs to women.

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It could be worse, though. Last week it was rumored that White House press secretary Jay Carney, who once worked in Moscow for Time Magazine, wanted the job. In what universe does unsuccessful sparring with the White House press corps qualify someone to spar with the Russian bear?

Still, I concede that it probably doesn't make much difference who becomes the new ambassador to Russia. Obama, assisted by John Kerry and Susan Rice, will set our Russia policy. And they will set it with the same lack of seriousness that lends plausibility to reports that Rice wants to make an affirmative action pick for the post of ambassador.

NY Times

[Only Seeding Reminds Virginia of Sampson Days](#)

by Viv Bernstein



Tony Bennett has directed Virginia to an A.C.C. championship with defense and a team concept.

GREENSBORO, N.C. — If Ralph Sampson raised Virginia's national profile and gave the men's basketball program its identity in the 1980s, he remains the towering measure of every team that has come through Charlottesville since.

Yet in all the years after the Sampson era, which ended in 1983, few Virginia teams have come close to matching that success. Until now.

The Cavaliers, coming off their first Atlantic Coast Conference tournament title since 1976, enter the N.C.A.A. tournament as the No. 1 seed in the East Region. Virginia will face No. 16 Coastal Carolina on Friday in Raleigh, N.C.

The last time Virginia was a No. 1 seed? It was 1983, when Sampson was a senior and the Cavaliers were among a handful of elite teams in the country.

Of course, Tony Bennett knew all about Sampson's legacy when he took over the Virginia basketball program in 2009. Here is what he did not know: The Cavaliers had little history worth noting beyond those four years.

In a recent interview, Bennett said he was surprised by the program's number of A.C.C. finishes above .500, conference championships and even N.C.A.A. appearances, expecting them to be higher. "You saw there were good stretches," he said, "but there wasn't that much consistency, and that was kind of a motivation or the challenge that was in front of me."

How to get there? The Bennett way. And that is where any comparison to the Sampson era ends. These Cavaliers do not have a 7-foot-4 pillar in the middle. They do not have a national player of the year candidate. They did not have a single player on the news media's A.C.C. all-conference first team, although guard Malcolm Brogdon was on the coaches' first team. They are not a team of stars.

Instead, Virginia has won primarily by playing an excruciatingly deliberate, grinding style that has made the Cavaliers the No. 1 scoring defense in the country this season; they hold opponents to 55.3 points a game

Just ask Duke.

"I think they're a really good defensive team," Duke's Rodney Hood said after shooting 4 of 12 here Sunday in the A.C.C. tournament championship game, which [Virginia won, 72-63](#). "But at the same time, I think we got a lot of looks," adding that some were "going to haunt me tonight."

Virginia haunts a lot of players with a style that is not always pretty to behold. But Bennett, the son of Dick Bennett, who succeeded as a coach at every level in Wisconsin, has sold that defensive mentality to his players and rebuilt a program that entered this season having lost 18 of its last 22 A.C.C. tournament games. Until last week, the Cavaliers had not even made it to the semifinals since 1995.

"What he's done is, he's built a program," Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski said of Bennett. "It's not just a Virginia team. It's a Virginia program."

It has been a slow, steady progression since Bennett arrived. His 2009-10 team was 15-16. The Cavaliers improved to 16-15 the next year, then were 22-10 with an N.C.A.A. tournament bid in 2012 and 23-12 in 2012-13. They are 28-6 so far this season. If Virginia advances to the Round of 16, it will record the second 30-win season in team history. The first was in 1981-82, Sampson's junior year, when Virginia was 30-4.

Looking back, no one predicted this year's Cavaliers would rank among the country's best. They were picked to finish a respectable fourth in the A.C.C. and were unranked for much of the season. Then came a disastrous game at Tennessee on Dec. 30, an 87-52 loss.

"It was huge," Brogdon said of the loss, which dropped Virginia to 10-4. "It was a wake-up call for us. It showed us that we had to play together if we're going to move forward and have success this season. It showed us we all have to play our roles and buy into the program. So that's what we did from that point forward."

That program included a new role for Joe Harris, the closest Virginia had to a star player last season. Harris averaged a team-best 16.3 points in 2012-13 as an all-A.C.C. first-team selection by coaches and the news media. He is averaging 11.7 points this season and was a second-team choice among coaches, third among the news media.

"I wasn't asked necessarily to do anything differently," Harris said, "but I knew that if we were going to have a much more balanced scoring attack this season, we needed somebody to take over more of a leadership role, more of a glue-guy type of role, and I had no problem doing that, and it has been beneficial to all of our success this season. I don't think we'd have the same success if I was taking the same amount of shots and trying to get the points that I might have gotten last year."

After the Tennessee loss, Virginia went 16-2 in the A.C.C., including 13 wins in a row. The streak was capped with a 75-56 victory over Syracuse on March 1, which clinched Virginia's first A.C.C. regular-season title since 1981, Sampson's sophomore year.

If there was any doubt about Virginia's mettle, that was settled in the A.C.C. tournament. Victories against Florida State and Pittsburgh set up a final against Duke, the only team Virginia had not defeated this season. How fitting. After all, you cannot become a blue blood in the A.C.C. unless you beat one.

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And for now, that is enough for longtime fans who have waited decades to see Virginia become a factor in the A.C.C. and the N.C.A.A. tournament again.

"Ralph was fun because he was a star, he got all the publicity and you knew a big play could happen at any time — a big dunk, a big block and all that," said Greg Wells, 59, of Charlottesville, who attended the A.C.C. tournament. "But this team is fun to watch."

"I don't know if it's where it was in '81 because it was probably the most dominant program for two years in college basketball. But I think we're at the point now where we can compete with anybody, which is so nice."

Wells is not the only fan who has waited a long time to see the Cavaliers rise again.

“Oh, I don’t know what the measure is,” Sampson, who lives in Phoenix, said in a telephone interview Monday. “I was there many, many years ago, 30 years ago, and we took it to the highest level that we could take it and got there. Hopefully, that’s some of the measuring stick.

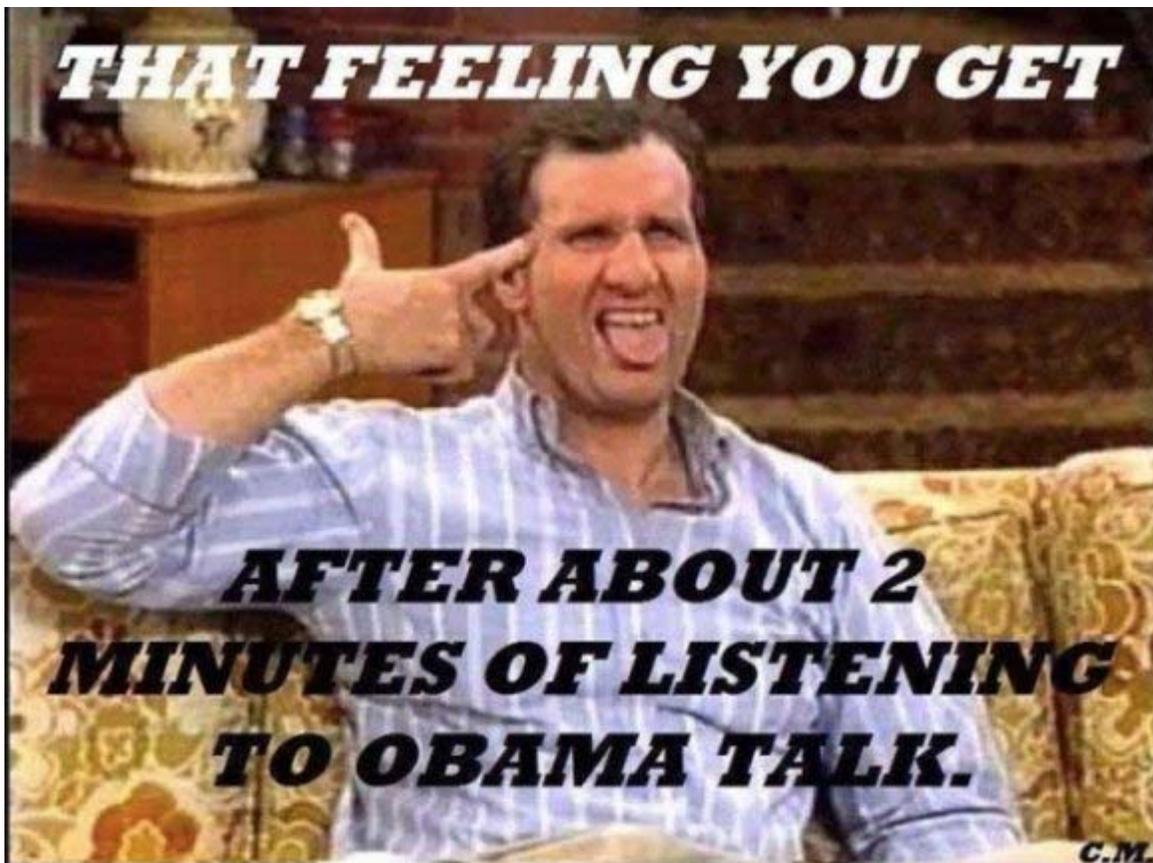
“But I really don’t worry about the measuring stick; I just want Virginia to be consistently good every year, not be up and down and wait this long to be successful.”







THAT FEELING YOU GET



**AFTER ABOUT 2
MINUTES OF LISTENING
TO OBAMA TALK.**

C.M.