

August 7, 2014

Victor Davis Hanson says by always taking the easy route in the short term, the current administration has guaranteed longer term trouble.

The Obama administration often either denies any responsibility for the current global chaos or claims that it erupted spontaneously. Yet most of the mess was caused by, or made worse by, growing U.S. indifference and paralysis.

Over the last five and a half years, America has had lots of clear choices, but the administration usually took the path of least short-term trouble, which has ensured long-term hardship.

There was no need to “reset” the relatively mild punishments that the George W. Bush administration had accorded Vladimir Putin’s Russia for invading Georgia in 2008. By unilaterally normalizing relations with Russia and trashing Bush, Barack Obama and then–Secretary of State Hillary Clinton only green-lighted further Russian aggression, which has since spread to Crimea and Ukraine.

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Any time Israel’s enemies have glimpsed growing distance in the U.S.–Israeli friendship, they seek only to pry it still wider. We see just that with terrorists in Gaza who launch hundreds of missiles into Israel on the expectation that the U.S. will broker a favorable deal that finds both sides equally at fault. ...

Lacking the courage and willpower to stop Russia's hegemonic leaps, the president settles for denigrating Putin and the country. **Craig Pirrong** has the story. While avoiding short term pain, President Pretend says he's taking the long view. *Before departing on his I’ll Golf While the World Burns Vacation and Birthday Party, Obama gave an interview for The Economist. It is beyond belief.*

Here is what jumped out at me (from a Reuters article summarizing the interview):

‘President Barack Obama dismissed Russia as a nation that “doesn’t make anything” . . .

Obama downplayed Moscow’s role in the world, dismissing President Vladimir Putin as a leader causing short-term trouble for political gain that will hurt Russia in the long term.

“I do think it’s important to keep perspective. Russia doesn’t make anything,” Obama said in the interview.

“Immigrants aren’t rushing to Moscow in search of opportunity. The life expectancy of the Russian male is around 60 years old. The population is shrinking,” he said.

Obama told Putin last week that he believes Russia violated the 1988 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty designed to eliminate ground-launched cruise missiles.

Speaking of Russia's "regional challenges," Obama said in the interview: "We have to make sure that they don't escalate where suddenly nuclear weapons are back in the discussion of foreign policy."

Of all the Obama idiocies, this has to rank near the top.

Jennifer Rubin posts on the current state of the US-Israel relationship.

... The bottom line is relations with Israel have never been so bad for so long. The Times muses that "the chronic nature of this tension is unusual — and, according to current and former officials, rooted in ill will at the very top. 'You have a backdrop of a very acrimonious relationship between the president and the prime minister of Israel,' said Robert M. Danin, a Middle East expert at the Council on Foreign Relations."

It's not really the president per se, but the policies and rhetoric he's used, starting with the Cairo speech (that analogized Palestinians to enslaved African Americans and implied that Israel's claim to the land was based on Holocaust guilt), continuing through the out-of-control condemnations of Israel issuing building permits in its capital and up to the administration blaming Israel for the collapse of the "peace process" and negotiating a rotten interim deal with Iran, which seeks to wipe Israel off the map. Ambushing Netanyahu with a new position on the "1967 borders" didn't help either.

It's almost a certainty that if the president hadn't gone bonkers over settlements, hadn't staked his foreign policy on an impossible peace process, had stood his ground in the P5+1's talks with Iran and not berated Israel publicly for failing to use sufficient caution (what do they possibly know about how much caution is being taken?), relations would be better. How do we know most of the rift is Obama's fault? Our other allies — Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, etc. — are just as fed up with him as is Israel. Only in Obama's mind is everything someone else's fault.

Noemie Emery writes on the "genius" president.

It's now two and a half years to the can't-come-too-soon end of President Obama's adventure, but his legacy seems to be settled already; he is the smartest man in all of U.S. history to screw up so many big things.

That he is brilliant is something we already knew. "This is a guy whose IQ is off the charts," Michael Beschloss said of Obama, who was the "smartest guy" to be president. Christopher Buckley said he was first class in temperament and intellectual prowess, boosting him two slots above Franklin D. Roosevelt in the gray matter arena. "You could see him as a New Republic writer," said David Brooks, closing the argument.

But fact that this genius has become a disaster became clear in mid-June when the Middle East imploded, matching his health care debacle with its foreign equivalent. The non-connection of political wisdom to what intellectuals think makes for intelligence was never more painfully clear.

Democrats are quick to lay claim to the mantle of intellect, at least in the more modern age: Jimmy Carter was said to be smarter than Gerald Ford, everyone was said to be smarter than Ronald Reagan, Michael Dukakis was said to be smarter than George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton said to be

smarter than all except his wife, Hillary, and Al Gore and John Kerry much smarter than George W. Bush, whose SAT scores, the New York Times told us, had to be much, much lower than Kerry's, until it was found they were not. ...

Thomas Sowell wonders if thinking has become obsolete.

Some have said that we are living in a post-industrial era, while others have said that we are living in a post-racial era. But growing evidence suggests that we are living in a post-thinking era.

Many people in Europe and the Western Hemisphere are staging angry protests against Israel's military action in Gaza. One of the talking points against Israel is that far more Palestinian civilians have been killed by Israeli military attacks than the number of Israeli civilians killed by the Hamas rocket attacks on Israel that started this latest military conflict.

Are these protesters aware that vastly more German civilians were killed by American bombers attacking Nazi Germany during World War II than American civilians killed in the United States by Hitler's forces?

Talk show host Geraldo Rivera says that there is no way Israel is winning the battle for world opinion. But Israel is trying to win the battle for survival, while surrounded by enemies. Might that not be more important? ...

NY Times article suggests running just 5 minutes a day has important benefits.

Running for as little as five minutes a day could significantly lower a person's risk of dying prematurely, according to a large-scale new study of exercise and mortality. The findings suggest that the benefits of even small amounts of vigorous exercise may be much greater than experts had assumed.

In recent years, moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, has been the focus of a great deal of exercise science and most exercise recommendations. The government's formal 2008 exercise guidelines, for instance, suggest that people should engage in about 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week. Almost as an afterthought, the recommendations point out that half as much, or about 15 minutes a day of vigorous exercise, should be equally beneficial.

But the science to support that number had been relatively paltry, with few substantial studies having carefully tracked how much vigorous exercise is needed to reduce disease risk and increase lifespan. Even fewer studies had looked at how small an amount of vigorous exercise might achieve that same result.

So for the new study, ...

National Review

The Cost of American Indifference

By continually taking the path of least short-term trouble, the U.S. ensures long-term hardship.

By Victor Davis Hanson

The Obama administration often either denies any responsibility for the current global chaos or claims that it erupted spontaneously. Yet most of the mess was caused by, or made worse by, growing U.S. indifference and paralysis.

Over the last five and a half years, America has had lots of clear choices, but the administration usually took the path of least short-term trouble, which has ensured long-term hardship.

There was no need to “reset” the relatively mild punishments that the George W. Bush administration had accorded Vladimir Putin’s Russia for invading Georgia in 2008. By unilaterally normalizing relations with Russia and trashing Bush, Barack Obama and then–Secretary of State Hillary Clinton only green-lighted further Russian aggression, which has since spread to Crimea and Ukraine.

There was no need for Obama, almost immediately upon assuming office, to distance the U.S. from Israel by criticizing Israel’s policies and warming to its enemies, such as Hamas and the authoritarian Turkish prime minister Recep Erdogan.

Any time Israel’s enemies have glimpsed growing distance in the U.S.–Israeli friendship, they seek only to pry it still wider. We see just that with terrorists in Gaza who launch hundreds of missiles into Israel on the expectation that the U.S. will broker a favorable deal that finds both sides equally at fault.

Sanctions had crippled Iran to the point that it soon would have grown desperate to meet U.S. demands to stop its nuclear enrichment. Instead, Obama eased trade restrictions just as they were coming to fruition. Iran is now on its way to acquiring a bomb, while supplying missiles to Hamas and Hezbollah.

We had an option in Libya to let the tottering but reforming Moammar Qaddafi government fend for itself. Or we could have taken out Qaddafi and then sent in peacekeepers to ensure a transition to ordered government. But the Obama administration did neither. Instead, the U.S. participated in a multi-nation bombing campaign and all but guaranteed that a failed state would be left on Europe’s doorstep. Now we have just closed our embassy in Tripoli and fled the country entirely.

There were once viable choices in Egypt. Instead, the administration managed to alienate the old Hosni Mubarak regime; alienate the elected Muslim Brotherhood, which immediately tried to subvert the democracy; and alienate the military junta that stepped in to stop the Islamization of Egypt. All of these rival groups now have one thing in common: a distrust of the United States.

We could have made a choice in Iraq to negotiate a bit more with the Nouri al-Maliki government, leave behind a few thousand token peacekeepers, and thereby preserve the calm achieved by the surge. Instead, the administration pulled out U.S. soldiers to ensure that a withdrawal would be an effective reelection talking point. The result of that void is the present bloodletting and veritable destruction of Iraq.

The U.S. once had choices in Syria. We could have loudly condemned the Bashar al-Assad government and immediately armed the most pro-Western of the anti-Assad rebels. Or we could have just stayed quiet and stayed out of the mess. Instead, we chose the third — and worst — option: loudly threaten Assad while doing nothing. Now a bloody dictatorship and its bloody jihadist enemies share a general contempt for a perceived weak America.

There were choices on our own border as well. Obama could have advised Central American governments that our southern border was closed to any who would cross illegally, while attempting to remedy the violence in those countries. Instead, the administration opened the border, welcomed in thousands without scrutiny, and has all but destroyed federal immigration law. The result is chaos.

The Obama administration apparently has assumed that calm, not conflict, is the natural order of things. The world supposedly can run on autopilot without much guidance from its only superpower.

If conflict does arise, the U.S. counts on sermonizing without feeling any need to back up tough and often provocative rhetoric with action. When occasional decisions must be made, the U.S. usually chooses the easiest way out: withdrawals, concessions, and appeasement.

Behind these assumptions also lie the administration's grave doubts that the U.S. has in the past played a positive role in postwar affairs, or that in the present and future America can claim the moral authority — or has the resources — to confront aggressors.

In 2017, Obama may well leave office claiming to have reduced our military while avoiding conflict during his tenure. But will he also be able to assure us that China, Iran, and Russia are less threatening; that the Middle East, the Pacific, and the former Soviet republics are less explosive; that our own border is more secure — and that America is safer?

To paraphrase Robert Frost: Two roads diverged in the world, and we always took the one of least resistance — and that has now made all the difference.

Streetwise Professor

As the World Burns

by Craig Pirrong

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Here is what jumped out at me ([from a Reuters article summarizing the interview](#)):

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Obama downplayed Moscow's role in the world, dismissing President Vladimir Putin as a leader causing short-term trouble for political gain that will hurt Russia in the long term.

“I do think it's important to keep perspective. Russia doesn't make anything,” Obama said in the interview.

“Immigrants aren’t rushing to Moscow in search of opportunity. The life expectancy of the Russian male is around 60 years old. The population is shrinking,” he said.

Obama told Putin last week that he believes Russia violated the 1988 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty designed to eliminate ground-launched cruise missiles.

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Of course, some are cheering the fact that he dissed Putin and Russia. Big. Fucking. Deal.

Those who cheering are missing the import of his remarks. This is Obama’s way of saying that Russia doesn’t matter, and hence its depredations can be ignored. In the long sweep of history, it is doomed to oblivion. So why worry? Ukraine? Temporary issue. This too shall pass.

To quote Keynes: In the long run, we are all dead. Or in the short-to-medium run, if you are Ukrainian (and maybe Lithuanian, Estonian, Georgian, etc.)

I would note that the Mongols, Huns, Vandals, Goths, etc., etc., etc., didn’t make anything either. Aggressive powers are heavy on the destruction, not the production. Their inability to make is one reason why some peoples and nations strive to take. That is exactly why they have to be stopped.

What’s more, “making stuff” is certainly a source of power, it is neither necessary nor sufficient. Putin has proven masterful at exploiting Russia’s pumped and mined, rather than manufactured, wealth to exercise power and influence.* Indeed, Russia’s energy wealth is the primary weapon that Putin has used to intimidate the Europeans into impotence: note that the last round of sanctions, allegedly so harsh, excluded gas, and Gazprom remains untouched. Russia, for all its alleged economic primitiveness, has been far more successful at exercising power using energy than Germany has with all its manufacturing prowess.

By condescendingly criticizing Putin’s short-termism, and apparent failure to understand Russia’s interests as well as he does, Obama overlooks the fact that a short-sighted leader can wreak tremendous carnage in pursuit of those allegedly short-destructive goals.

By dismissing Russia’s importance, and leaving the fate of every bordering country to It Will All Work Out in the End When Russia Collapses, Obama is basically washing his hands of the region.

If Obama’s diagnosis is correct, and Russia is really an aggressive but weak power, his prescription is all wrong. A weak power can be stopped by the application of power by an immeasurably stronger one, before it runs amok. But Obama just wants to stand back, and let nature-or history, actually-take its course.

But it gets worse. Note Obama’s remarks on the nuclear issue. In not so many words (because in using so many words before regarding Syria, he created a huge mess), he drew a red line: as long as Putin doesn’t “escalate where suddenly nuclear weapons are back in the discussion of foreign policy”, it’s OK! More of a green light, than a red line, actually.

So just don’t use nukes, Vlad, and you are good.

Putin will read this interview, and will then rub his hands with glee. Obama clearly expressed his extreme unwillingness to confront Putin in any meaningful way, and by saying implicitly that escalation short of the threatened use of nuclear weapons will draw no US response, Putin has every incentive to escalate.

This frivolity, this egg-head approach to foreign policy that focuses on long run trends while ignoring short run imperatives and the nature of our adversary, is exactly why the world burns.

*I would also take issue with the implication that mining and oil and gas production are somehow technologically backwards and less economically productive than manufacturing. Jed Clampett to the contrary, oil does not just flow from the ground. Nickel and gold are not lying around for the taking. Both require tremendous applications of technology and capital.

I wonder if Obama will denigrate Canada as a country that “doesn’t make anything”?

Never mind. It would be quite in character.

Right Turn

Obama vs. Israel

by Jennifer Rubin

The [New York Times](#) report on the administration’s reaction to Gaza is telling. “[T]he government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has largely dismissed diplomatic efforts by the United States to end the violence in Gaza, leaving American officials to seethe on the sidelines about what they regard as disrespectful treatment.” Seething that Israel would not accept terms imported from Qatar and felt it necessary to defeat an enemy bent on its destruction? Yup, that’s the sort of thing that really fries this administration. Even worse, the State Department, on background of course, says that it’s over-the-top condemnation of an Israeli strike and civilian casualties was meant to “box them in internationally.” Then the administration threw a fit when Israel’s free and independent media and background sources criticized Secretary of State John F. Kerry’s diplomatic blunder. (Did they see what the U.S. media said about Kerry? What Israelis say about their own government?)

The bottom line is relations with Israel have never been so bad for so long. The Times muses that “the chronic nature of this tension is unusual — and, according to current and former officials, rooted in ill will at the very top. ‘You have a backdrop of a very acrimonious relationship between the president and the prime minister of Israel,’ said Robert M. Danin, a Middle East expert at the Council on Foreign Relations.”

It’s not really the president per se, but the policies and rhetoric he’s used, starting with the Cairo speech (that analogized Palestinians to enslaved African Americans and implied that Israel’s claim to the land was based on Holocaust guilt), continuing through the out-of-control condemnations of Israel issuing building permits in its capital and up to the administration blaming Israel for the collapse of the “peace process” and negotiating a rotten interim deal with Iran, which seeks to wipe Israel off the map. Ambushing Netanyahu with a new position on the “1967 borders” didn’t help either.

It’s almost a certainty that if the president hadn’t gone bonkers over settlements, hadn’t staked his foreign policy on an impossible peace process, had stood his ground in the P5+1’s talks with Iran and not berated Israel publicly for failing to use sufficient caution (what do they possibly know

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Examiner

[Intellectual hubris hampers presidential geniuses](#)

by Noemie Emery

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This does not explain how the Gipper (the "amiable dunce" in the Clark Clifford telling) turned out to be rated as the best president since Franklin Roosevelt, the man whom Oliver Wendell Holmes once proclaimed had a "first-rate temperament," though only a third-level mind. But with his "gentleman's C" he was miles ahead of our two greatest presidents, whose formal schooling never passed what we would call middle school, and were widely mocked by elites of their day.

[John Adams](#) mocked [George Washington](#); Henry Adams found little to like in [Abraham Lincoln](#) or [Theodore Roosevelt](#), and [John Quincy Adams](#) never got over his loss to [Andrew Jackson](#), becoming irate when his alma mater bestowed a degree on his unlettered successor in 1833. As he wrote to the president of the university (who was his cousin), "I could not be present to see my darling Harvard disgrace herself by conferring a Doctor's degree upon a barbarian and a savage who could scarcely spell his own name." The "savage," of course, knew how to get to the point of the matter in a way that scholars can't master. "The only Latin I know is E Pluribus Unum," he said.

Is it coincidence that our three most intellectual presidents — John Adams, James Madison, and John Quincy Adams — were neither successful nor happy in in office, found it the least happy period of their long and productive careers?

Michael Dukakis, called a great brain because he took a book on Swedish land use policies to read on vacation, was never able to explain why it was prudent to give murderers unsupervised

furloughs, an idea that elites found humane and progressive, and voters found mad. Similarly, Obama is in trouble because he could not get his brain around two base rules of politics so commonsense and self-evident as to need no explanation whatever: big and transformative laws cannot survive without deep, broad support from the public; the absence of power invites aggression, and withdrawing the carrots and sticks of American power from tense situations asks unbridled hell to step in.

Children should know this, which is why it eludes the more snotty among us — who should never be heard from again.

Jewish World Review **Is Thinking Obsolete?**

by Thomas Sowell

Some have said that we are living in a post-industrial era, while others have said that we are living in a post-racial era. But growing evidence suggests that we are living in a post-thinking era.

Many people in Europe and the Western Hemisphere are staging angry protests against Israel's military action in Gaza. One of the talking points against Israel is that far more Palestinian civilians have been killed by Israeli military attacks than the number of Israeli civilians killed by the Hamas rocket attacks on Israel that started this latest military conflict.

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Has any other country, in any other war, been expected to keep the enemy's civilian casualties no higher than its own civilian casualties? The idea that Israel should do so did not originate among the masses but among the educated intelligentsia.

In an age when scientists are creating artificial intelligence, too many of our educational institutions seem to be creating artificial stupidity.

It is much the same story in our domestic controversies. We have gotten so intimidated by political correctness that our major media outlets dare not call people who immigrate to this country illegally "illegal immigrants."

Geraldo Rivera has denounced the Drudge Report for carrying news stories that [show](#) some of the negative consequences and dangers from allowing vast numbers of youngsters to enter the country illegally and be spread across the country by the Obama administration.

Some of these youngsters are already known to be carrying lice and suffering from disease. Since there have been no thorough medical examinations of most of them, we have no way of knowing whether, or how many, are carrying deadly diseases that will spread to American children when these unexamined young immigrants enter schools across the country.

The attack against Matt Drudge has been in the classic tradition of demagogues. It turns questions of fact into questions of motive. Geraldo accuses Drudge of trying to start a "civil war."

Back when masses of immigrants from Europe were entering this country, those with dangerous diseases were turned back from Ellis Island. Nobody thought they had a legal or a moral "right" to be in America or that it was mean or racist not to want our children to catch their diseases.

Even on the less contentious issue of minimum wage [laws](#), there are the same unthinking reactions.

Although liberals are usually gung ho for increasing the minimum wage, there was a sympathetic front page story in the July 29th San Francisco Chronicle about the plight of a local non-profit organization that will not be able to serve as many low-income minority youths if it has to pay a higher minimum wage. They are seeking some kind of exemption.

Does it not occur to these people that the very same thing happens when a minimum wage increase applies to profit-based employers? They too tend to hire fewer inexperienced young people when there is a minimum wage law.

This is not breaking news. This is what has been happening for generations in the United States and in other countries around the world.

One of the few countries without a minimum wage law is Switzerland, where the unemployment rate has been consistently less than 4 percent for years. Back in 2003, The Economist magazine reported that "Switzerland's unemployment neared a five-year high of 3.9% in February." The most recent issue shows the Swiss unemployment rate back to a more normal 3.2 percent.

Does anyone think that having minimum wage laws and high youth unemployment is better? In fact, does anyone think at all these days?

NY Times

[Running 5 Minutes a Day Has Long-Lasting Benefits](#)

by Gretchen Reynolds



Running for as little as five minutes a day could significantly lower a person's risk of dying prematurely, according to a large-scale new study of exercise and mortality. The findings suggest that the benefits of even small amounts of vigorous exercise may be much greater than experts had assumed.

In recent years, moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, has been the focus of a great deal of exercise science and most exercise recommendations. The government's formal 2008 exercise guidelines, for instance, suggest that people should engage in about 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week. Almost as an afterthought, the recommendations point out that half as much, or about 15 minutes a day of vigorous exercise, should be equally beneficial.

But the science to support that number had been relatively paltry, with few substantial studies having carefully tracked how much vigorous exercise is needed to reduce disease risk and increase lifespan. Even fewer studies had looked at how small an amount of vigorous exercise might achieve that same result.

So for the new study, published Monday in [The Journal of the American College of Cardiology](#), researchers from Iowa State University, the University of South Carolina, the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, La., and other institutions turned to a huge database maintained at the Cooper Clinic and Cooper Institute in Dallas.

For decades, researchers there have been collecting information about the health of tens of thousands of men and women visiting the clinic for a check-up. These adults, after completing extensive medical and fitness examinations, have filled out questionnaires about their exercise habits, including whether, how often and how speedily they ran.

From this database, the researchers chose the records of 55,137 healthy men and women ages 18 to 100 who had visited the clinic at least 15 years before the start of the study. Of this group, 24 percent identified themselves as runners, although their typical mileage and pace varied widely.

The researchers then checked death records for these adults. In the intervening 15 or so years, almost 3,500 had died, many from heart disease.

But the runners were much less susceptible than the nonrunners. The runners' risk of dying from any cause was 30 percent lower than that for the nonrunners, and their risk of dying from heart disease was 45 percent lower than for nonrunners, even when the researchers adjusted for being overweight or for smoking (although not many of the runners smoked). And even overweight smokers who ran were less likely to die prematurely than people who did not run, whatever their weight or smoking habits.

As a group, runners gained about three extra years of life compared with those adults who never ran.

Remarkably, these benefits were about the same no matter how much or little people ran. Those who hit the paths for 150 minutes or more a week, or who were particularly speedy, clipping off six-minute miles or better, lived longer than those who didn't run. But they didn't live significantly longer than those who ran the least, including people running as little as five or 10 minutes a day at a leisurely pace of 10 minutes a mile or slower.

"We think this is really encouraging news," said Timothy Church, a professor at the Pennington Institute who holds the John S. McIlHenny Endowed Chair in Health Wisdom and co-authored the study. "We're not talking about training for a marathon," he said, or even for a 5-kilometer (3.1-

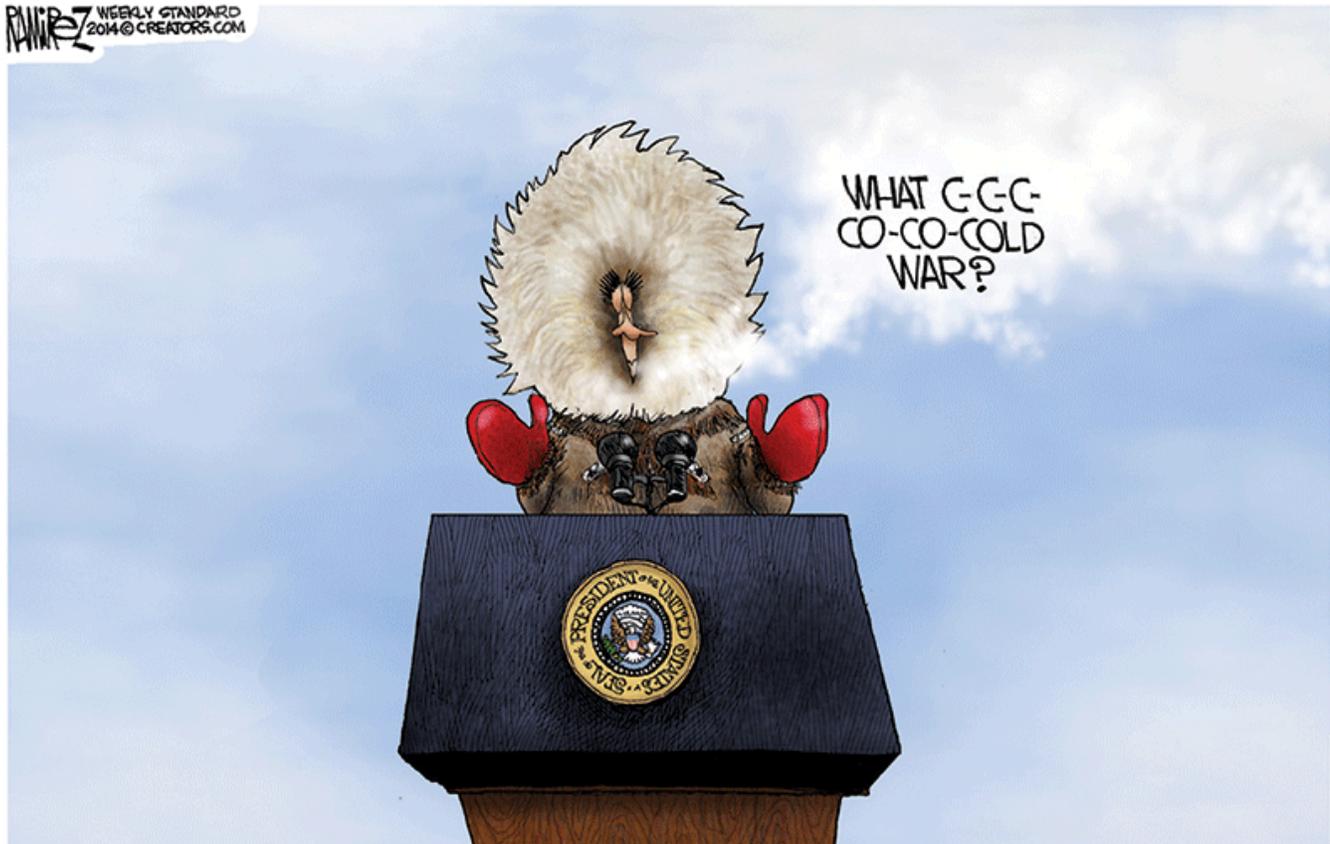
mile) race. “Most people can fit in five minutes a day of running,” he said, “no matter how busy they are, and the benefits in terms of mortality are remarkable.”

The study did not directly examine how and why running affected the risk of premature death, he said, or whether running was the only exercise that provided such benefits. The researchers did find that in general, runners had less risk of dying than people who engaged in more moderate activities such as walking.

But “there’s not necessarily something magical about running, per se,” Dr. Church said. Instead, it’s likely that exercise intensity is the key to improving longevity, he said, adding, “Running just happens to be the most convenient way for most people to exercise intensely.”

Anyone who has never run in the past or has health issues should, of course, consult a doctor before starting a running program, Dr. Church said. And if, after trying for a solid five minutes, you’re just not enjoying running, switch activities, he added. Jump rope. Vigorously pedal a stationary bike. Or choose any other strenuous activity. Five minutes of taxing effort might add years to your life.

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PLAYING "ONE-LETTER" HANGMAN WITH THE MAIN STREAM MEDIA

