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ADMISSION AU COLLEGE UNIVERSITAIRE
Samedi 2 mars 2013
ANGLAIS
durée de l'épreuve : 1h30 – coefficient 1

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Détail des notes		Commentaires
I. Compréhension du texte	/10	
II. Essai	/10	
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The Obama doctrine

By cynical tradition “abroad” is where American presidents go to seek a legacy, after their domestic agendas have stalled. This is especially true of second-term presidents. As they lose momentum at home, the temptation is to head overseas in search of crises that only American clout can resolve.

At the outset of his second term, Barack Obama seems to be planning the opposite approach. Mr Obama and his team believe that his outstanding task is to secure a domestic legacy. Their fear is that foreign entanglements may threaten that goal. It may help that he secured something of a global legacy on the day he was elected four years ago amid worldwide adulation, peaking with a Nobel peace prize awarded after less than a year in office, essentially for not being George W. Bush.

On the 2012 campaign trail, Mr Obama earned some of his warmest applause when he vowed to bring troops back from Afghanistan, ending more than a decade of war-fighting that has cost thousands of American lives and more than a trillion dollars. Time for nation-building “right here at home”, he constantly declared, to cheers. In a newspaper essay on November 23rd Mr Obama’s former White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, rammed the point home. Democrats need to make America globally competitive, wrote Mr Emanuel, now mayor of Chicago. Whether it means fixing failing schools, potholed roads, snail-like internet networks or a broken immigration system, the second-term mission must be to “come home and rebuild America”.

Yet the world keeps calling. From Gaza to Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, the disputed waters around China or even the euro zone, foreign crises threaten to sidetrack Mr Obama.

Looking overseas, wariness is all. Senior officials say that Mr Obama aims to be “present but not deeply involved” around the globe. They call America an “indispensable catalyst” and the cornerstone of a rules-based international order centred on economic competitiveness (deals on free trade and climate change may get a look-in on those grounds). By winding down the Bush legacy of an all-consuming military response to the September 11th attacks, Mr Obama has freed up “national security bandwidth” to engage with the world in all its complexity. It is an experiment: a macro-policy of engagement that shuns the micromanagement of intervention. On a political note, voices add that muscular action against al-Qaeda has bought Mr Obama space: Democrats are no longer so defensive about national security.

But there is immense caution about larger military commitments. When it comes to Syria, the government thinks 80 to 90 senators are deeply sceptical about direct intervention. But inaction leaves some officials pretty unhappy. A sign came when Turkey recently asked NATO for Patriot anti-missile systems to deploy on its border with Syria. In Washington, some officials hoped that this might be a backdoor route to enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria. Alas, the generals called the idea impractical.

Inside the government, there is debate as to whether Mr Obama's arms-length foreign strategy will survive contact with a turbulent world. Elements of this debate are familiar. After the cold war's end, Americans wrestled with whether to accept the role of global policeman. In 1993 Colin Powell (then the top soldier) told the Senate that when the world dialled 911, the emergency phone number, America was expected to answer. It was Madeleine Albright who coined the idea of America as the "world's indispensable nation" on being named secretary of state in 1996, amid arguments over intervention in ex-Yugoslavia.

Nobody is calling for a return to the sweeping ambitions of the Bush era after the 2001 terror attacks. The current debate resembles that of the 1990s: in these discussions 911 is again a phone number, not a date. Yet the context for the debate is bleak and unfamiliar. Compared with the 1990s, America looks far lonelier. Back then Americans hoped the European Union might become a second global policeman. There was talk of China and Russia becoming "responsible stakeholders" in the new world order. As it turned out, Europe's highest ambition was to be a global trainer of policemen. Today, broke and inward-looking, the EU cannot manage even that, offering significant help only on sanctions against Iran. Russia is intensely suspicious of American goals, and China is the distilled essence of self-interest. Even devoted Atlanticists are sunk in gloom. The NATO alliance is in "terrible shape", stretched beyond its financial, military and political limits, says Kurt Volker, a former American ambassador to NATO.

Fresh crises will come. If America is pulled in deeply, it will be against all Mr Obama's instincts. The president has plans; but they revolve around fixing America, not the world.

The Economist - Dec 1st 2012

I. TEXTUAL COMPREHENSION.

After reading the text carefully, reply in English and in your own words to the following questions.

1. Why are second-term US Presidents usually in search of foreign crises that America can solve?

2. What should Barack Obama's second-term mission actually consist in according to Rahm Emanuel?

3. What is Barack Obama's approach to national security and military commitment overseas?

4. What is America's position in the current foreign policy context?

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