



American diplomacy

What Hillary did next

WASHINGTON, DC

Since failing to win the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton has loyally served Barack Obama as secretary of state. We assess her record and ponder her plans

“WHY extremists always focus on women is a mystery to me. But they all seem to. It doesn't matter what country they're in. They want to control women. They want to control how we dress, they want to control how we act, they want to control everything about us.” So said Hillary Clinton last month to a young Arab woman who had asked her at a public meeting about wearing the *hijab*. This encounter was in Tunis, where Mrs Clinton had just taken part in an international summit on Syria. She had come straight from London, where she attended a meeting on Somalia, and went on to Algeria and Morocco before making the nine-hour hop back to Washington, D C .

If Barack Obama is reelected in November, one big thing is going to be different in his second term. He will no longer have his relentlessly globetrotting former presidential rival at his side. As the frazzled aides and reporters who travel regularly in the back of her converted Boeing 757 attest, the job is punishing, especially the way she has chosen to do it.

Since taking office, Mrs Clinton has visited 95 countries (see map on next page) and logged some 730,000 miles, sometimes cramming more than a dozen meetings into a single day. This marathon came hard after the titanic Democratic presiden-

tial campaign of 2008. “I've had an extraordinary 20 years. I've been really at the highest levels of American political life,” she told *The Economist* in a recent interview, “I need a little time to reflect, step off the fast track I've been on.”

Evaluating her record is a complicated business. The job of a secretary of state has at least three parts: implementing foreign policy, acting as America's global ambassador and running the behemoth that is the State Department. But in the first and most visible of these-foreign policy—it is the president who takes the lead.

That has been especially true of this administration. By some accounts, Mr Obama has been the most hands-on foreign-policy president since Richard Nixon (see page 85). When America is at war, Washington's centre of gravity tilts even further towards the White House and the Pentagon and away from the State Department in Foggy Bottom.

Moreover Mrs Clinton started her job in unusual circumstances. With the victorious presidential campaign team ensconced in the White House and a defeated one at State, she needed to quell any lingering suspicions between the rival teams by showing a perfect loyalty. Not once in three years has she quarrelled in public with Mr Obama, and only once—

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during the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt—did the wires between the State Department and the White House become seriously crossed.

That is commendable, but compounds the difficulty of assigning credit and blame for foreign policy. She says she has had no difficulty meeting the president on “anything, any time”. By the end of 2011, by the State Department's count, she had taken part in nearly 600 meetings at the White House. But on some hot issues she has stood on the margins or run things at arm's length. Mr Obama gave Joe Biden, his vice-president, the lead in Iraq. “Af-Pak” strategy was delegated to her friend, the late indefatigable Richard Holbrooke; and a special envoy, George Mitchell, was given charge of reviving negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Not until the archives are opened will historians know reliably what big issues, if any, she and Mr Obama fought over. But on most big decisions there has been little cause to fight. She and the president had a shared view of America's global predicament after George W. Bush left office. She says now that it was “painful” when she started to make her phone calls to hear ••

A transcript of our interview with Mrs Clinton is available at www.economist.com/clintontranscript

• earned by making few waves—except for what he calls her biggest accomplishment, saving America from what would have been a "disastrous" hands-off policy in Libya. The question now, he adds, is whether her record will be stained by a victory for Bashar Assad in Syria.

Still, even her critics pay tribute to her high intelligence and astonishing work rate. At the end of 2011, almost 70% of Americans approved of how she was doing. Barring some mishap, she looks set to leave with her reputation enhanced.

For Mr Obama, offering her State was a bet that paid off. He gained an adviser and ambassador of presidential calibre, while removing from the Senate a powerful Democratic rival who might have formed a nucleus of disaffection. Her own decision to accept the job was harder. She is said to have come round only after friends and advisers listed the political benefits of adding achievements on the world stage to her existing accomplishments in the Senate and before.

Whether she will run for the presidency again, nobody outside her inner circle can know. Her early departure is inconclusive: no secretary of state since the 1960s has served out two terms. But when the election of 2016 arrives she will be 69; no older, she can tell herself, than Ronald Reagan at the start of his presidency. In the meantime, says one of her supporters, the "Clinton network" remains in existence, ready to be activated. The temptation to reach again for the top prize in politics will be hard to resist.

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