READING COMPREHENSION C1 (Tom Standage's ten trends to watch in 2025 www.economist.com)

IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE that 2025 has been designated the year of quantum science and technology by the United Nations. Because like Schrödinger's cat, which (in a quantum thought-experiment) was both alive and dead at the same time inside a closed box, 2025 has hovered in a superposition of two very different states, defined by the outcome of America's election. Now the ballot boxes have been opened, the world knows which 2025 to expect: the one where Donald Trump returns to the White House. With that uncertainty resolved, here are ten themes to watch in the coming year.

1. America's choice.
The repercussions of Mr Trump's sweeping victory will affect everything from immigration and defence to economics and trade. His "America First" policy will have friends and foes alike questioning the solidity of America's alliances. This could lead to geopolitical realignments, heightened tensions and even nuclear proliferation.

2. Voters expect change.
More generally, incumbent parties did badly in 2024's unprecedented wave of elections. Some were chucked out (as in America and Britain); others were forced into coalition (as in India and South Africa); others were pushed into cohabitation (as in Taiwan and France). So 2025 will be a year of expectations. Can new leaders deliver what they promised? Will humbled leaders change? If not, unrest may follow.

3. Broader disorder.
Mr Trump may push Ukraine to do a deal with Russia and give Israel a free hand in its conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. America's more transactional stance and scepticism of foreign entanglements will encourage troublemaking by China, Russia, Iran and North Korea (the "quartet of chaos") and more meddling by regional powers, like that seen in crisis-hit Sudan. But it is unclear whether America would stand up to China in a conflict over Taiwan or in the South China Sea.

4. Tariffying prospects.
For now, America's rivalry with China will manifest itself as a trade war, as Mr Trump imposes restrictions and ramps up tariffs—including on America's allies. As protectionism intensifies, Chinese firms are expanding abroad, both to get around trade barriers and to tap new markets in the global south. So much for decoupling; Chinese firms, building factories from Mexico to Hungary, have other plans.

5. Clean-tech boom.

China’s government has encouraged booming exports of solar panels, batteries and electric vehicles to offset a weak domestic economy. The result is a Chinese-led clean-tech boom, with adoption of solar panels and grid storage outstripping forecasts. And the world will soon learn whether global emissions have peaked.

6. After inflation.
The rich world’s central bankers have celebrated the defeat of inflation. Now Western economies face a new challenge: reducing deficits, by increasing taxes, cutting spending or boosting growth. Many may also have to increase defence budgets. Painful economic choices loom. In America, Mr Trump’s policies will make things worse: hefty import tariffs could hamper growth and reignite inflation.

7. Age-old questions.
America has just picked its oldest-ever president-elect. World leaders are greying, along with their populations. Expect more discussion of age limits for political leaders. China, meanwhile, is looking for economic opportunities in an ageing world. In parts of the Middle East, by contrast, a booming youth population, coupled with a shortage of jobs, risks instability.

8. Crunch time for AI.
It’s the biggest gamble in business history: more than $1trn is being spent on data centres for artificial intelligence (AI), even though companies are still not sure how to use it and adoption rates are low (though many workers may simply be using it in secret). Will investors lose their nerve, or will AI prove its worth, as “agentic” systems become more capable and AI-developed drugs emerge?

9. Travel troubles.
The global movement of people, not just goods, faces increasing friction. Conflict is disrupting global aviation. Europe is adding new border checks, and its borderless Schengen system is fraying. The backlash against “overtourism” will diminish in 2025, but restrictions introduced by many cities, from Amsterdam to Venice, will remain.

10. Life of surprises.
With assassination attempts, exploding walkie-talkies and giant rockets being captured by chopsticks, one lesson of 2024 was to expect the unbelievable. What implausible-sounding things could happen in 2025? Our “Wild cards” section offers a selection to watch out for, including a devastating solar storm, the discovery of lost ancient texts—and even another global pandemic.

To navigate the future, it can help to anticipate the unlikely. We hope you will find The World Ahead 2025 a useful guide to the coming year, whatever surprises await.

Read the passage carefully and answer the following multiple-choice questions. Select the most appropriate answer based on the content of the text.

1. According to the article, how is the year 2025 being compared to Schrödinger’s cat?

A) It is an unpredictable year, with outcomes being determined by multiple political factors.
B) It is a year that will bring certain clarity to global events.
C) It is like Schrödinger's cat in that it will be both alive and dead.
D) It symbolizes the unpredictability of future technology advancements.

2. What is the main implication of Trump’s return to the White House, as outlined in the article?

A) Global stability will improve, particularly in trade.
B) There will be a shift towards protectionism and geopolitical realignments.
C) U.S. alliances will strengthen, particularly with China and Russia.
D) It will result in fewer conflicts globally, particularly in the Middle East.

3. What is meant by the term “quartet of chaos” in the context of the article?

A) A group of world leaders, including Trump, who are expected to change the course of history.
B) The four countries (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea) that will potentially create instability due to the U.S.'s transactional foreign policy.
C) A new economic group that will drive the global economy in 2025.
D) The four biggest challenges the U.S. will face during Trump’s presidency.

4. Which statement about China’s clean-tech initiatives is true according to the passage?

A) China is cutting back on clean-tech exports due to internal economic challenges.
B) China’s clean-tech boom is driven by the global push for carbon neutrality.
C) China’s clean-tech industry is focused on addressing its weak domestic economy while dominating foreign markets.
D) China has stopped investing in renewable energy technologies in favor of traditional energy sources.

5. What does the article suggest might be the impact of the Western world’s fight against inflation?

A) It will result in lower defense spending and economic growth.
B) It will lead to further economic turmoil, particularly through tax hikes and cuts in social spending.

C) It will usher in a period of economic prosperity and ease.
D) It will have little impact on global economic relations.

6. What issue does the article raise regarding the aging population of world leaders?

A) There will be a mass retirement of older political figures.
B) Countries like China will face difficulties due to a young workforce.
C) There will be increased political instability due to aging leaders.
D) There will be more discussions on implementing age limits for political leaders.

7. According to the article, what are the potential risks of AI development?

A) It will create new jobs for workers, but threaten privacy.
B) The lack of clear understanding of its practical use might result in a loss of investment.
C) It will have little impact on industries such as medicine and finance.
D) It will cause economic stagnation due to its high cost and low adoption rate.

8. What is one of the biggest challenges to global travel in 2025?

A) The collapse of the aviation industry.
B) The growing number of people traveling without passports.
C) The disruption caused by conflict, border restrictions, and anti-tourism policies.
D) The failure of cities to implement borderless systems like Schengen.

9. The "Wild cards" section in the article refers to:

A) Unlikely but possible events that could have a significant global impact in 2025.
B) A prediction of random events, like sports or entertainment.
C) A group of countries that are expected to surprise the world in 2025.
D) The potential for unforeseen technological advances in the coming year.

10. What overall tone does the article suggest about the year 2025?

A) It will be predictable and orderly, with few surprises.
B) The year will bring peace and stability to global relations.
C) The year will be uncertain, marked by major geopolitical and technological shifts.
D) It will be dominated by economic prosperity and global cooperation.

Answers & Explanations:

1. **A) It is an unpredictable year, with outcomes being determined by multiple political factors.**
   Explanation: The reference to Schrödinger's cat highlights the uncertainty of 2025, with its fate hanging on the result of the U.S. election.

2. **B) There will be a shift towards protectionism and geopolitical realignments.**
   Explanation: The article suggests that Trump's return will lead to a more protectionist stance, with global implications for alliances and trade.

3. **B) The four countries (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea) that will potentially create instability due to the U.S.'s transactional foreign policy.**
   Explanation: The term "quartet of chaos" refers to these nations, which might increase instability as the U.S. shifts its foreign policy focus.

4. **C) China's clean-tech industry is focused on addressing its weak domestic economy while dominating foreign markets.**
   Explanation: The article notes China's push to expand clean-tech exports to offset its own economic challenges, with a focus on tapping global markets.

5. **B) It will lead to further economic turmoil, particularly through tax hikes and cuts in social spending.**
   Explanation: The article suggests that Western economies will face tough choices to reduce deficits, likely leading to cuts in spending and increased taxes.

6. **D) There will be more discussions on implementing age limits for political leaders.**
   Explanation: The article discusses the aging of political leaders and the possibility of discussions on age limits in response to this trend.

7. **B) The lack of clear understanding of its practical use might result in a loss of investment.**
   Explanation: Despite heavy investments in AI, uncertainty about its applications could cause hesitation or even financial loss for investors.

8. **C) The disruption caused by conflict, border restrictions, and anti-tourism policies.**
   Explanation: The article highlights growing challenges in global travel, including the impact of conflict and various restrictions on the movement of people.

9. **A) Unlikely but possible events that could have a significant global impact in 2025.**
   Explanation: The “Wild cards” section refers to unpredictable events, like a solar storm or global pandemic, which could alter the world’s trajectory.

10. **C) The year will be uncertain, marked by major geopolitical and technological shifts.**
    Explanation: The overall tone of the article suggests a year filled with uncertainties and significant global changes in various sectors.

Vocabulary

- Quantum science: Ciencia cuántica
- has hovered in: ha estado presente en
- ballot boxes: urnas electorales
- sweeping victory: victoria rotunda
- heightened tensions: tensiones aumentadas
- incumbent parties: partidos en el poder
- were chucked out: fueron echados
- cohabitation: convivencia
- humbled leaders: líderes humillados
- unrest may follow: puede haber disturbios
- give X a free hand: dar carta blanca a X
- foreign entanglements: enredos internacionales
- encourage troublemaking: fomentar la creación de problemas
- meddling: injerencia
- rivalry: rivalidad
- ramp up tariffs: aumentar aranceles
- expanding abroad: expandirse al extranjero
- get around trade barriers: sortear barreras comerciales
- tap new markets: acceder a nuevos mercados
- decoupling: desacoplamiento
- clean-tech boom: auge de la tecnología limpia
- offset: compensar
- grid storage outstripping forecasts: el almacenamiento en redes superando las previsiones
- peak: pico
- defeat of inflation: derrota de la inflación
- increase defence budgets: aumentar los presupuestos de defensa
- loom: amenazar (en el contexto de algo que se acerca)
- hefty: considerable / pesado
- hamper growth: dificultar el crecimiento
- reignite inflation: reavivar la inflación
- greying: envejecimiento
- shortage of jobs: escasez de empleos
- instability: inestabilidad
- crunch time for AI: momento crítico para la IA
- gamble: apostar
- lose their nerve: perder la compostura / perder el valor
- border checks: controles fronterizos
- backlash against: reacción en contra de
- diminish: disminuir
- chopsticks: palillos
- implausible-sounding things: cosas que suenan improbables
- watch out for: tener cuidado con / estar atento a