

Nov 04, 2016 by **Nicholas J. Cull**

Obama's America Conquers The World ^[1]

It is received wisdom among those who monitor the ebb and flow of national reputations that major movements are rare. The cartoon crisis of 2005 sent Denmark into a nose-dive. The end of apartheid in South Africa lifted that country into a new league. Mostly the rankings have been surprisingly stable, with France, Germany and the United Kingdom jostling for the top slot in the leading index, the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index. Against this expectation of stability, the results of this year's Anholt index are all the more startling. The United States has soared from the doldrums of number seven to the top spot as the most admired country in the world. The founder of the Index, Simon Anholt, attributed America's jump to one factor: the election of Barack Obama to the presidency. However, due to the spread of categories which comprise an index rating, in order to move so dramatically the United States has had to 'move the needle' not only in its politics, but in the reputation of its people, culture and as a tourist destination.

But before America pops the champagne, a word of caution. It would be nice to say that America's jump in the index (or the earlier jumps in the Pew Global survey) is the product of a massive investment in public diplomacy, but this is not the case. That investment still remains an unfulfilled election promise. In fact the 'good news' might yet emerge as 'bad news', as it removes the urgency from the issue of PD reform. The US can not live off the reputation of its President alone. To stay at the top the USA needs to both invest in and to reform its public diplomacy, to address the prominence of the military in the delivery of the 'brand America' experience and create a workable inter-agency mechanism. Whether she speaks for the 'top nation' or not, Under Secretary Judith McHale still has a massive challenge ahead.
