

Nov 04, 2016 by **Philip Seib**

Public Diplomacy's Impact and Prospects ^[1]

A perennial question about public diplomacy is, “Does it work?” Congress quite rightly asks that whenever budgets are being scrutinized, and public diplomacy practitioners do their best to provide definitive answers.

This can be difficult because only a late harvest will discover all the fruit of public diplomacy. Student exchange programs, for example, may have greatest effect decades later, when the former students have become government officials.

Nevertheless, survey research can provide useful insights about public diplomacy's effects. The State Department's International Information Programs (IIP) office conducts a biannual Public Diplomacy Impact study, which includes surveys and focus groups around the world. These are among the study's findings as reported by IIP:

- **PD LEADS TO POSITIVE CHANGE.** Of individuals exposed to U.S. public diplomacy, 79 percent have used what they learned from PD to bring about positive change in their own communities by doing volunteer work, starting a new business, running for political office, organizing a civil society group, and other projects.
- **PD REDUCES ANTI-AMERICANISM.** Only 11 percent of individuals exposed to U.S. public diplomacy hold anti-American views – that the United States is untrustworthy, that it does not respect other countries, that it has a negative impact on world affairs, and so forth. More than twice as many (24 percent) of the individuals NOT exposed to PD hold these views.
- **PD INCREASES UNDERSTANDING OF THE U.S.** Fully 94 percent of individuals exposed to U.S. public diplomacy say their PD experience has increased their understanding of U.S. foreign policy, the American people, American society and values.
- **PD IMPROVES U.S. FAVORABILITY.** Similarly, 94 percent of individuals exposed to U.S. public diplomacy say their PD experience has increased their favorable attitude toward U.S. foreign policy, the American people, American society and values.
- **PD PARTICIPANTS SHARE WHAT THEY LEARN.** Finally, 81 percent of individuals who have been exposed to U.S. public diplomacy have shared what they learned from their PD experience with their family, friends, professional colleagues, and others.

As with any survey, some will quibble about methodology and definitions, but these findings constitute useful and convincing evidence of public diplomacy's power.

Secretary of State John Kerry should take note of this. He is working exceptionally hard to bring stability to the Middle East, but he will not be successful if he convinces only the region's political leaders to support his efforts. He needs the publics of the Arab countries and Israel to trust the United States and its peace proposals. Achieving that will require robust public

diplomacy at the center of U.S. policy initiatives.

In speeches delivered since he became Secretary of State, Kerry has shown that he understands the need for foreign policy to have a strong popular base at home as well as in the countries with which the United States is working. He has been in politics a long time and knows the importance of constituency-building. Given the findings of the IIP study, he should recognize what a valuable tool he has in the State Department's public diplomacy work.
