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Public Diplomacy in the News: A History of State Dinners, Eurovision Boycott, and L.A.'s Olympic Angst ^[1]

“Public Diplomacy in the News” is a CPD Blog series by Andrew Dubbins that spotlights noteworthy stories on public diplomacy topics such as cultural diplomacy, nation branding, exchange programs, international events and conferences, digital diplomacy, and strategic global communications.

A history of state dinners. On April 10, 2024, President Joe Biden and Dr. Jill Biden hosted a state dinner to honor Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, demonstrating the tradition's

role in building alliances and friendships among world leaders. VIP guests included former President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, billionaire Jeff Bezos, and actor Robert DeNiro, with a performance by musician Paul Simon. White House state dinners have long been a vital tool of U.S. diplomacy, showcasing America's global influence and fostering relationships with international leaders. The first White House state dinner was back in 1874, when President Ulysses S. Grant hosted King David Kalakaua during the Hawaiian monarch's visit to the U.S. to secure a tariff treaty. Other notable examples include Franklin Roosevelt's soirees for the British royals on the eve of World War II, and Lyndon Johnson's unique Texas-style dinner for West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard. State dinners involve meticulous planning, from guest list curation to menu preparation, aiming to reflect the visiting dignitary's culture while showcasing American cuisine and hospitality.

Stewart McLaurin / USA Today

Eurovision entrants walk a political tightrope. This year's Eurovision Contest (May 11) has become ensnared in political tension, as artists and fans grapple with participating amidst the controversy surrounding Israel's actions in Gaza. UK's Olly Alexander and Ireland's Bambie Thug, among others, find themselves navigating the diplomatic tightrope, with some artists like Bambie Thug openly calling for peace and an "immediate and lasting ceasefire" in Gaza. Israel's inclusion in Eurovision has stirred discussions about boycotting the event. Venues like London's Rio Cinema have chosen not to screen the contest in protest, highlighting the difficulty of separating art from politics. Despite the celebration of Eurovision's rich history and its return to Sweden (home of ABBA), the ongoing conflict in Gaza looms large, making this year's contest one of the most politically charged in recent memory.

Katie Spencer / Sky News

L.A. struggling with 2028 Olympics prep. The financial implications of hosting the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles are becoming increasingly apparent as the city faces the daunting challenge of updating its transportation infrastructure to accommodate the mega-event. Despite initial plans for extensive rail line development, officials are now focused on funding over \$1 billion for buses, a solution that may only serve the city temporarily during the Games. The private LA28 organizing committee, with a budget of \$6.9 billion, does not cover the cost of the needed 2,700 buses, double Metro's current fleet. Efforts are being made to secure federal funding, following the precedent set by previous U.S. Olympics, with almost \$900 million already announced for transportation improvements. However, Metro's chief innovation officer expressed concern over the lack of federal grants to cover the operational scale required. The city's ambitions for a lasting transportation legacy face significant financial shortfalls, with Mayor Karen Bass and Metro officials working to find solutions while managing expectations for accelerated infrastructure projects initially tied to the Games.

Rachel Uranga / Los Angeles Times

U.S. Diplomacy in the Pacific Islands. Linda Thomas-Greenfield—31st United States Ambassador to the United Nations—shared insights from her visit to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in the Cook Islands, emphasizing the United States' commitment to standing with the Pacific Island nations. She highlighted the importance of showing up and listening to the stories of Pacific Islanders, their concerns about climate change, and their aspirations for sustainable development. The U.S. plans to empower communities in the Pacific, recognizing the shared history, people-to-people ties, and mutual interests in

economic prosperity and national security. Thomas-Greenfield discussed the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen ties through the Compacts of Free Association Amendments Act and the development of the first-ever U.S. strategy for the Pacific Islands. She mentioned the expansion of diplomatic and development presence in the region, the strengthening of Pacific regional architecture, and the U.S.'s commitment to addressing climate change, maritime security, and gender equity.

United States Mission to the United Nations & CSIS

Janet Yellen's chopstick diplomacy. During Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's recent trip to China, aimed at rebuilding relations between the U.S. and China, her dining choices drew attention from Americans and Chinese alike, somewhat overshadowing the diplomatic purpose of her visit. Yellen's preference for dining among locals without partitions, her adept use of chopsticks, and her willingness to try various Chinese cuisines, from Sichuan dumplings to Peking duck, caught fire on social media and invited commentary from Chinese politicians. Even as Yellen tackled significant issues like criticizing "artificially cheap Chinese products" and expressing concerns over TikTok, her simple act of dining at local eateries, both in China and the U.S., have demonstrated a more relatable and human side of diplomacy, making her visits and policies more accessible and talked about among local audiences.

The Associated Press
