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Public Diplomacy in the News: Michael Douglas as Ben Franklin, Global Health Diplomacy, and Election Misinformation ^[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.

Michael Douglas shines as Ben Franklin in new miniseries. “Franklin” on Apple TV+ portrays Benjamin Franklin’s diplomatic efforts in France during the Revolutionary War to

garner support against the British. According to a review by Clint Worthington for RogerEbert.com, Michael Douglas brings Franklin to life with a mix of historical wit and charismatic flair. The show explores Franklin's old world charm and diplomatic acumen in navigating the French aristocracy, overcoming obstacles posed by British spies, and handling conflicts with his American contemporaries, notably John Adams. Worthington argues that the subplot surrounding Franklin's grandson Temple, played by Noah Jupe, feels like filler compared to the main storyline. But overall, Worthington finds "Franklin" a compelling look at the complex diplomacy that helped forge a nation.

Clint Worthington / RogerEbert.com

A deep dive on global health diplomacy. The Council on Foreign Relations hosted an Academic Webinar led by Irina Faskianos, featuring experts Yanzhong Huang and Rebecca Katz. They discussed global health security and diplomacy amid ongoing geopolitical tensions and pandemic responses. Key topics included the challenges of implementing the International Health Regulations, the political and economic factors influencing global health, and the urgent need for international cooperation to manage public health crises effectively. The discussions also touched on the role of misinformation, the importance of diplomatic channels in health, and the impact of climate change on health security. Huang and Katz emphasized the complex relationship between health security and geopolitical dynamics, advocating for more robust global governance mechanisms to comprehensively address these intertwined issues.

Council on Foreign Relations

Misinformation bubbling up ahead of U.S. presidential elections. Anonymous users on social media platforms, particularly on X (formerly Twitter), are increasingly dominating right-wing political discussions and spreading misinformation. For instance, a user using a pseudonym recently claimed that there were skyrocketing voter registrations without photo IDs in key states, a claim that quickly gained traction online due to endorsements from high-profile figures like Elon Musk and Marjorie Taylor Greene, despite being refuted by state election officials. This issue underscores the broader challenge of combating false information online, especially during critical periods like presidential elections, where such claims can quickly amass millions of views and influence public opinion. The situation is compounded by social media algorithms that amplify sensational content and the financial incentives platforms offer for high engagement, further entrenching the spread of misinformation by anonymous or pseudonymous accounts.

Ali Swenson & Melissa Goldin / Associated Press

The Saudi ambassador to the United States navigates tense diplomatic relations. Princess Reema Bandar Al-Saud, currently the Saudi ambassador to the U.S., has taken on the challenging role previously held by her father, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, at a time when U.S.-Saudi relations are particularly strained. Since assuming her position in 2019, shortly after the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Princess Reema has been working to navigate the complex dynamics between the two nations, from managing fallout over Khashoggi's death to adapting to the Biden administration's cooler stance towards Saudi Arabia. Her efforts have been pivotal during incidents such as the diplomatic fist-bump with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, which signaled a grudging détente amid geopolitical shifts like the Ukraine crisis. Princess Reema's work extends beyond diplomatic relations, as she also

engages in public relations efforts to enhance Saudi Arabia's image in the U.S., highlighting reforms and promoting a new vision of the kingdom. Her tenure reflects a significant era in U.S.-Saudi relations, marked by efforts to balance traditional diplomacy with modern challenges and public perception.

Kate Kelly / The New York Times

Calls to modernize Britain's Foreign Office. A group of former senior UK diplomats has called for the replacement of the Foreign Office with a new Department for International Affairs, aiming to modernize and broaden the UK's approach to global challenges such as trade, aid, development, and climate change. The proposed department would focus on long-term international objectives with enduring mandates and a commitment to allocate 1% of national income to these priorities. This comes in response to criticisms that the existing Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is elitist, outdated, and struggling with clear mandate delivery. The pamphlet, resulting from a conference in Oxford, highlights the need for a revamped department—with "fewer colonial era pictures on the wall"—to better reflect modern Britain's role on the world stage. The pamphlet also recommends a shift from traditional alliances to more pragmatic partnerships, particularly with emerging middle powers.

James Landale / BBC
