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Public Diplomacy in the News: Panda Diplomacy, Sauna Diplomacy, and an Olympic Truce ^[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.

California and China embrace panda diplomacy. During her nine-day trip across five Chinese cities, San Francisco Mayor London Breed not only celebrated cultural connections

but also signed a significant agreement to bring two giant pandas to the San Francisco Zoo. This move, reflective of Breed's broader efforts to foster diplomatic relations, contrasts sharply with the federal government's harsher stance on China, as well as a national trend of U.S. leaders distancing themselves from the Communist nation. California Governor Gavin Newsom's earlier visit to China also emphasized the importance of collaboration, particularly in addressing climate change, a high priority issue for California. These actions by California's leaders highlight the state's demographic and historical connections to Asia, aiming to build bridges and promote economic and cultural exchanges. Said Breed: "An important part of my city, San Francisco, is not just the Chinese community that were born there, but many of the families that have immigrated from China and still have relatives, relationships here in China."

Jonathan Cheng / The Wall Street Journal

Finland's "sauna diplomacy" counters Russian surveillance. Finnish diplomats have revived "sauna diplomacy" to conduct sensitive discussions securely, away from potential Russian surveillance. This traditional Finnish practice, which involves conducting meetings in saunas where participants are naked—and thus unlikely to carry recording devices—was recently discussed by the Finnish ambassador to Germany, Kai Sauer, in an interview with *The Telegraph*. He emphasized the sauna's role as a safe and equitable space where hierarchical distinctions disappear, allowing for open and candid conversations. Saunas are a UNESCO world heritage item in Finland, which boasts three million saunas for the nation's 5.5 million people. All government buildings in Finland contain a sauna, as do consulates and embassies abroad. Sauna diplomacy not only strengthens privacy and security at a time of expanded Russian surveillance but also demonstrates a unique element of Finland's soft power, promoting cultural connections and mutual trust through a shared, quintessentially Finnish experience.

James Rothwell / The Telegraph

An "Olympic truce" in Paris. French President Emmanuel Macron says he is committed to securing an "Olympic truce" during the upcoming Summer Games in Paris, amidst ongoing global conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan. In an interview with BFM television, Macron noted the historical significance of the Olympic truce dating back to ancient Greece, where conflicting rulers would agree to lay down arms—known as *ékécheiria*—throughout the Games, ensuring safe travel for both athletes and spectators to and from the host nation. Macron emphasized that the Games also serve a diplomatic purpose and that he will actively seek cooperation from international partners to support the truce. He also addressed security concerns for the opening ceremony scheduled for July 26, stating that if necessary, the venue could be shifted from the Seine River to ensure the safety of the event, with robust security measures and contingency plans in place. Macron reiterated his promise to swim in the Seine, which he has vowed would be clean enough for the Summer Games.

RFI

AirBnB funds U.S.-Japan rural tourism exchange. Airbnb has committed \$1 million to initiate a rural tourism exchange program between the U.S. and Japan, aimed at enhancing economic opportunities through tourism in rural areas of both countries. According to a release by the company, the initiative aligns with Airbnb's goal of promoting travel to lesser-known destinations and dispersing tourism benefits more widely. The program will include professional exchanges under the State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP), in which cohorts of Japanese tourism and hospitality professionals will visit the U.S. and lodge at AirBnBs to explore best practices in rural tourism. AirBnB hopes the

program will help strengthen U.S.-Japan bilateral relations and foster economic development in rural regions through cultural exchange and professional collaboration.

AirBNB

Public diplomacy through literature in Nepal. In a Q&A for *The Kathmandu Post*, Garrett Wilkerson discussed his role as Public Affairs Chief in the U.S. Embassy in Nepal and how literature fosters mutual understanding between the two countries. The U.S. maintains a collection of over 25,000 books at its embassy in Nepal and its “American Corners” throughout the country. Wilkerson emphasizes American literature as an important medium through which Nepalis gain insights into American culture and perspectives, aiding in breaking down cultural barriers. The Public Affairs Office also organizes events and visits different regions to engage directly with the Nepali community, enhancing diplomatic relations and cultural exchange. Outside Wilkerson’s official duties, he enjoys a broad range of literature, which he says contributes to his understanding and effectiveness in his diplomatic role. His book recommendations include: *One Life* by Megan Rapinoe, *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote, *Waiting* by Ha Jin, *Afterparties* by Anthony Veasna So, and *Toward Eternity* by Anton Hur.

Anish Ghimire / The Kathmandu Post
