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Public Diplomacy in the News: Bamboo Diplomacy, Pentagon Disinformation Campaign, and European Identity Through Photos [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.

Vietnam's "Bamboo Diplomacy" balances global powers and boosts investment. Vietnam has adeptly managed its international relations, hosting high-profile visits from Joe

Biden, Xi Jinping, and Vladimir Putin within the past nine months, all while balancing ties with rival global powers. This strategic neutrality has enabled Vietnam to attract significant foreign investment and become a crucial manufacturing hub, all while maintaining good relations with its major trading partners, China and Russia. Vietnam's most senior political figure, Nguyen Phu Truong, dubbed this "bamboo diplomacy," pointing to the plant's "strong roots, stout trunk and flexible branches." Despite geopolitical tensions, Vietnam's foreign policy remains independent and pragmatic, emphasizing the importance of diverse alliances. Hosting Putin, although controversial, underscores Vietnam's commitment to a balanced foreign policy, even as it seeks to avoid alienating the US and its allies.

A. Anantha Lakshmi / Financial Times

Secret Pentagon anti-vax disinformation campaign exposed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. military launched a secret campaign to discredit China's Sinovac vaccine, targeting the Filipino public among others, as retaliation for Beijing's accusations against Washington, according to a Reuters investigation. The clandestine operation involved fake social media accounts spreading anti-vaccine propaganda, undermining public trust in life-saving health measures and potentially risking lives for geopolitical gain. The campaign, which started under President Trump and continued into Biden's administration, was condemned by public health experts and led to internal Pentagon reviews. Despite the controversy, the Pentagon's covert influence operations are set to continue under a new contract.

Chris Bing and Joel Schectman / Reuters

Exploring European identity through photo portraits. The Italian Cultural Institute of Krakow is currently hosting a photographic exhibition titled "What is Europe to you?" at Parc Jordana, showcasing a collection curated by Lisa Borgiani. Since 2019, Borgiani has traveled across major European cities, capturing 160 photographs of various individuals, each paired with personal reflections on the concept of Europe. This exhibition aims to explore the diverse feelings and opinions about the European Union, portraying a broad spectrum of European identities. The display features contributions from four Ukrainian photographers, highlighting European solidarity with Ukraine by including portraits from cities like Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, and Odessa.

Italian Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation & FP Magazine

Team USA's Olympic uniforms interweave tradition and modernity. Team USA's uniforms for the Paris Olympics, designed by Ralph Lauren, blend traditional American styles with modern elements and a focus on sustainability. The Opening Ceremonies outfit features navy blazers with red and white accents, blue and white striped oxford shirts, jeans, and taupe suede shoes, symbolizing a mix of formality and casual American spirit. The Closing Ceremonies attire includes auto racing-inspired jackets and white denim pants. Ralph Lauren emphasizes the use of recycled materials and responsible wool in the designs, reflecting a broader cultural focus on environmental sustainability. The designs aim to balance formal dignity and relaxed comfort, resonating with the athletes' preferences and symbolizing American culture and innovation on the global stage.

Alice Park / Time

Promoting African culture through dance and music in Bay Area schools. In a recent

radio feature by Hana Baba for KALW, Catherine Ndungu-Case, founder of Cheza Nami and a molecular biologist from Kenya, shares her journey of integrating African dance and music into Bay Area school assemblies. Over the past 13 years, Ndungu-Case has led her award-winning arts organization in pioneering educational programs that promote African cultural heritage. The discussion, held in her Pleasanton home, highlights her efforts in cultural diplomacy, demonstrating the power of the arts in fostering understanding and appreciation of African traditions among young audiences.

Hana Baba / KALW