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Public Diplomacy in the News: Notre Dame Reopening, Political Influence in Media, & U.S. Messaging in Africa ^[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.

Global leaders celebrate cultural heritage at Notre Dame reopening. The reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral welcomed world leaders including President-elect Donald Trump, U.S. First Lady Jill Biden, Britain's Prince William, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The grand event kicked off with the ceremonial knocks by Paris Archbishop Laurent Ulrich and featured a crosier made from fire-damaged beams, highlighting the cathedral's historic and contemporary cultural significance. The celebration showcased the intricately restored architecture and highlighted the global community's role in preserving and cherishing cultural heritage.

Thomas Adamson and John Leicester / AP

Project 2025 risks politicizing American state media, experts warn. Project 2025 proposes significant changes to American state media, highlighting concerns over political influence and governance within agencies like the United States Agency for Global Media. This initiative targets various media networks, calling for defunding some while altering the management structure of others to potentially align more closely with governmental directives. Experts like Nicholas Cull, a professor in USC's Master of Public Diplomacy program, warn that politicizing state media could undermine its credibility and effectiveness, noting, "If we're returning to the Cold War, the great insight was that you don't politicize your broadcasting. Audiences have great spin detectors."

Russell Payne / Salon

U.S. messaging in Africa needs overhaul. In an op-ed for *Foreign Policy*, Howard French critiques the flawed approach of U.S. diplomacy in Africa, as exemplified by President Biden's recent visit to Angola. French underscores the contradiction of attempting to strengthen relations through the tragic history of enslavement and the unsound strategy of justifying U.S. interest in Africa by framing it as a competition with China. He argues that real engagement requires substantial economic involvement and frequent high-level political interactions, rather than merely showcasing projects. French also highlights the potential for growth in Africa, suggesting that the U.S. should focus more on sustainable investment opportunities in various sectors instead of exploiting natural resources. His insights suggest a need for a significant overhaul in U.S. diplomatic language and strategies towards Africa to genuinely benefit both parties.

Howard French / Foreign Policy

Saudi Arabia bolsters global sports influence through strategic sponsorships and investments. Saudi Arabia is significantly expanding its influence in global sports through strategic investments and sponsorships, according to a recent report by Play the Game. With over 900 sponsorship deals, largely funded by its \$925 billion sovereign wealth fund, the country is not only hosting major sporting events but also engaging in high-profile sponsorships abroad. This includes sponsoring events like the WTA tournaments in the U.S., the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, and even the upcoming 2026 World Cup. The report highlights Saudi Arabia's use of sports as a means to project soft power and improve its global image, similar to strategies used by Qatar and China. However, Saudi Arabia uniquely integrates sports directly into its state governance, giving key sports figures significant political and financial power, exemplified by Yasir Al-Rumayyan's roles in both sports and state enterprises.

Samindra Kunti / Forbes

UNESCO launches Silk Roads exhibition on architecture and intercultural exchange. UNESCO has introduced the second volume of its "Thematic Collection of the Cultural

Exchanges along the Silk Roads," focusing on architecture, monuments, and urbanism, accompanied by an exhibition at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. This initiative showcases the major impact of intercultural exchanges along the Silk Roads on architectural styles and urban planning. Highlighting cities and ports along these historic routes, the publication and exhibition explore the synthesis of different architectural forms, the evolution of urban landscapes through technological and material exchanges, and the influence of these historical interactions on contemporary cultural dialogues.

UNESCO
