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TikTok Refugees & Food Diplomacy Fiascos ^[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.

“TikTok refugees” spark unlikely cross-cultural bonds. Amid rising U.S.-China tensions and the threat of a TikTok ban under the Trump administration, American users, dubbed “TikTok refugees,” found an unexpected digital sanctuary on RedNote, a Chinese social media platform. This migration sparked vibrant cultural exchanges, with Chinese users welcoming Americans through shared activities like posting pet photos, learning each other's

languages, and even solving math problems together. These grassroots interactions showcased a shared curiosity and goodwill that transcended political divides, fostering mutual appreciation and challenging stereotypes. The phenomenon highlights the transformative power of ordinary people connecting across cultures, even in times of strained diplomatic relations.

Anna Ge / The Diplomat

Food diplomacy fiascos. Diplomatic dining has often resulted in controversy, with menus and cultural sensitivities sparking incidents among world leaders. From the 2022 NATO summit's poorly timed serving of Russian salad to George H.W. Bush's infamous fainting and vomiting during a Japanese state dinner, such events highlight the complexities of international dining etiquette. Other notable episodes include Jacques Chirac's criticism of British cuisine, Finnish humor in response to Berlusconi's insults about their food, François Hollande canceling a lunch with Iran's Hassan Rouhani over wine disputes, and Brazil's Lula da Silva expressing dissatisfaction with portion sizes at state dinners in Paris and Rome. These incidents underscore the fine balance between tradition, personal preferences, and cultural diplomacy.

Politico EU / Ketrin Johecová

How diplomats can win over Trump. In an interview with *Politico*, Tom Fletcher, a seasoned diplomat and former advisor to three British prime ministers, offers insights on navigating U.K.-U.S. relations during Donald Trump's presidency. He emphasizes acknowledging Trump's preference for grandeur, which could be leveraged to enhance diplomatic ties. Fletcher praises Peter Mandelson, Britain's incoming ambassador, for his emotional intelligence and political acumen, which are well-suited for Trump's transactional approach. While cautioning against excessive concessions, he highlights challenges such as managing differences over NATO and the war in Ukraine. Fletcher also underscores the strain on global humanitarian efforts due to shrinking budgets and declining support, calling for better coordination and realistic goals in delivering aid amidst crises.

Politico EU / Anne McElvoy and Peter Snowdon

Panda diplomacy and conservation. The return of Bao Li and Qing Bao to the Smithsonian's National Zoo highlights the enduring appeal and significance of giant pandas as symbols of international diplomacy and conservation success. Since their debut in the U.S. during the Nixon era, pandas have remained icons of goodwill, yet their survival in the wild faces challenges due to habitat fragmentation, climate change, and difficulties with rewilding efforts. While China's conservation programs have successfully increased the panda population and protected critical habitats, sustaining wild populations requires new strategies and public acceptance of the risks involved in reintroduction. These efforts reflect the broader struggle to balance species preservation with human impact on the environment.

Jason Bittel / National Geographic
