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# Public Diplomacy in the News: Voice of America Shutdown, A Stall in Culinary Diplomacy, & the Rise of Rednote <sup>[1]</sup>

*“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.*

**Trump shuts down Voice of America, silencing global broadcasts.** President Trump’s executive order to dismantle the federal agency overseeing Voice of America (VOA) has effectively silenced the broadcaster, a longtime tool of U.S. diplomacy and democracy promotion. Following the order, hundreds of employees were placed on paid leave, losing access to work systems, and many VOA broadcasts, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, either went dark or were replaced with music. The move is part of a broader effort by the Trump administration to weaken the media, including barring certain news outlets and aligning taxpayer-funded broadcasting with his political agenda. Despite VOA’s charter guaranteeing editorial independence, Trump had previously criticized the organization for alleged liberal bias, appointing right-wing figures to leadership roles and discouraging critical coverage. Legal challenges to reinstate VOA journalists are underway, as critics warn that shutting down the broadcaster undermines U.S. efforts to counter state-controlled media in authoritarian regimes.

David Enrich / NYT

**Culinary diplomacy stalls amid U.S. policy shift.** A partnership between the U.S. State Department and the James Beard Foundation to promote American culinary diplomacy has stalled as the Trump administration reviews its alignment with current priorities, leaving participating chefs seeking alternative ways to continue their cultural outreach. Launched in 2012 and revived under President Biden, the Diplomatic Culinary Partnership aimed to use food as a bridge for international relations but faced criticism from conservatives over taxpayer expenses. While some chefs’ planned diplomatic engagements were canceled, influential figures like José Andrés advocate for grassroots culinary diplomacy, emphasizing the power of food to connect cultures beyond governmental programs.

Tim Ebner / Bon Appetit

**Bridging U.S.-China divides through digital connection.** The recent rise of RedNote, a Chinese social media app that gained popularity among American users after TikTok faced a potential ban, highlights a new form of cultural exchange between the U.S. and China. While historically, people-to-people exchanges helped bridge geopolitical divides, today’s digital interactions offer a rare, unfiltered look into Chinese life. Unlike past ideological engagements with Maoist China, contemporary American users on RedNote engage with Chinese culture through humor, curiosity, and social critique, challenging political narratives and fostering

unexpected cross-cultural connections. Despite this brief moment of exchange, the broader U.S.-China relationship remains strained, with political tensions limiting deeper engagement and reinforcing cultural isolation.

Mark Tseng-Putterman / Time & Made by History

**Disinformation surge following Trump-Zelenskyy dispute.** A surge of disinformation targeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy followed his tense meeting with Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance at the White House. False claims, many aligning with pro-Russian propaganda, spread rapidly on social media, accusing Zelenskyy of swearing at Trump, staging war scenes, and misusing U.S. aid funds. Misinformation watchdogs like NewsGuard recorded a dramatic rise in misleading narratives, including fabricated reports about USAID funding pro-Ukrainian bots. Fact-checking investigations debunked these claims, revealing manipulated videos and false reports designed to undermine Zelenskyy and Ukraine. This wave of propaganda reflects broader efforts to shape public opinion on the war and U.S. support for Ukraine.

Tetyana Klug & Monir Ghaedi / DW

**Duluth, Minnesota, strengthens cultural ties with Iraqi Kurdistan.** Duluth hosted a group of six high school students from Rayna, Iraqi Kurdistan, as part of a cultural exchange organized by Duluth Sister Cities International (DSCI). With support from Senator Amy Klobuchar's office in securing visas, this marked the first visit from an Iraqi delegation in a decade. The students experienced local culture through activities like curling, visiting colleges, and meeting government officials, while also sharing aspects of their own heritage. DSCI Executive Director Christy Rounds emphasized the importance of such exchanges in fostering understanding and recognizing shared human values. Over the next year, similar exchanges are planned with Duluth's other sister cities in Japan, Russia, Sweden, and Canada.

Izabella Zadra / Northern News Now

**Ancient cultural bonds between Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens.** New archaeological discoveries at Tinshemet Cave in central Israel suggest that Neanderthals and Homo sapiens not only coexisted between 130,000 and 80,000 years ago but also engaged in cultural exchanges. Excavations reveal shared burial customs, technological knowledge, and social interactions, challenging previous assumptions of rivalry between the species. Analysis of stone tools, hunting strategies, and symbolic practices indicates that the region was a hub of interaction, where demographic expansion led to intensified contact between different human groups. These findings highlight the complexity of early human relationships and suggest that cultural and technological advancements were often the result of interspecies collaboration rather than isolation.

Evrin Yazgin / Cosmos

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