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Sep 29, 2025 by [Andrew Dubbins](#)

Public Diplomacy in the News: **Smithsonian Preservation Effort, LA's** **Cultural Olympiad Concerns, & More** ^[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.

Citizen historians mobilize at Smithsonian. Fearing political interference in the Smithsonian under President Trump’s second term, professional and amateur historians have launched a grassroots effort to document museum exhibits before any mandated changes

occur. Following an executive order accusing the institution of promoting “harmful” narratives, volunteers armed with smartphones are photographing wall texts, artifacts, and displays across all 21 Smithsonian museums. Organized by historians Jim Millward and Chandra Manning, the initiative draws inspiration from earlier campaigns to preserve National Park signs and has already generated more than 25,000 images, creating a public record meant to safeguard historical integrity against political pressure.

Elizabeth Blair / NPR

Cultural Olympiad concerns for LA28. With the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics approaching, arts leaders worry that planning for the Cultural Olympiad, a tradition of ambitious arts programming tied to the Games, is dangerously behind schedule. Unlike Paris 2024, which staged thousands of cultural events, Los Angeles has yet to announce a plan, raised no dedicated funds, and assigned only minimal staff to the effort. Critics fear the city may resort to rebranding existing events instead of commissioning new works, missing a chance to showcase Los Angeles as a global cultural capital, while organizers insist a plan is forthcoming but must remain financially cautious.

Robin Pogrebin / New York Times

Women’s leadership gap persists globally. Despite progress since the 1990s, women remain underrepresented in political and public decision-making, with gender parity in leadership still decades away, according to a new report by UN Women. As of September 2025, only 32 women serve as heads of state or government, and women comprise just 22.9 percent of cabinet ministers and 27.2 percent of national parliamentarians, with vast regional disparities. At the local level, women hold 35.5 percent of seats in deliberative bodies, with quotas shown to significantly boost representation. Evidence from countries like India and Norway underscores that women’s leadership enhances governance outcomes, yet global parity is not expected before mid-century.

UN Women

Trump’s diplomacy in turmoil. President Donald Trump’s second term has left the U.S. State Department hollowed out, *Politico* reports, with over half of ambassadorships vacant, top roles filled by inexperienced acting officials, and career diplomats sidelined in policy decisions. Staffers say they are pressured to demonstrate “fidelity” to the administration, creating a climate of fear that suppresses dissent and stifles creative policymaking. Secretary of State Marco Rubio defends the restructuring as empowering embassies, but insiders describe a weaker, more compliant Foreign Service, alienated allies, confusion over orders, and limited transparency, all of which undermine America’s global influence.

Nahal Toosi / Politico

Moscow Fashion Week seeks cultural bridge. Moscow Fashion Week, alongside the BRICS+ Fashion Summit, sought to position Russia as an emerging alternative to traditional fashion capitals by spotlighting collaboration with Middle Eastern designers and markets. With over 65 Russian designers participating and delegations from across the Middle East, the events emphasized fashion’s role in cultural diplomacy, trade, and economic ties. Leaders like Jordan Fashion Week’s Shirene Rifai highlighted the shift away from Western dominance toward platforms giving non-Western voices equal footing, while sanctions on Russia opened

space for deeper Gulf–Russia partnerships, new supply chains, and expanded opportunities for both Arab and Russian brands.

Arab News
