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Feb 09, 2026 by [Andrew Dubbins](#)

Public Diplomacy in the News: Winter Olympics Storylines, State Department-NFL Collab, & 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.

Winter Olympics Beyond the Podium. With the Milan–Cortina Winter Olympics kicking off last Friday, NPR reported on a wide-ranging set of storylines that blend sport, politics, culture, and climate. Hundreds of athletes will compete across northern Italy amid high-profile

comebacks by American stars, the long-awaited return of NHL players to Olympic hockey, the debut of ski mountaineering, and generational shifts on U.S. teams, all against a backdrop of geopolitical tensions, environmental concerns in the Dolomites, questions about doping oversight, and milestones for gender equality in competition. All of these combined make the Milan-Cortina Games as much a test of global values, logistics, and sustainability as of athletic excellence.

NPR

NFL, State Department Team Up on Global Sports Diplomacy. The National Football League and the U.S. Department of State have formalized a new public-private partnership aimed at advancing American sports diplomacy by expanding the global reach of American football. Under a newly signed memorandum of understanding, the two sides will collaborate on international games, youth clinics, training programs, and cultural exchanges, using football to promote values such as teamwork, discipline, and unity while strengthening U.S. public diplomacy efforts abroad. The initiative will leverage U.S. embassies, consulates, and educational exchange programs, with NFL players serving as envoys and major events—such as last Sunday’s Super Bowl LX—anchoring worldwide engagement in dozens of countries across multiple continents.

NFL

AI Disinformation Threat Escalates. Advances in artificial intelligence are poised to radically transform disinformation campaigns, enabling small numbers of actors to deploy vast, coordinated “swarms” of AI-controlled social media accounts that can mimic human behavior, adapt in real time, and manipulate public opinion at unprecedented speed and scale. According to a new Science paper cited by experts across technology, security, and policy fields, these systems could overwhelm existing detection methods, precisely target communities, and potentially undermine democratic processes—including future U.S. elections—unless urgent, coordinated countermeasures such as an independent AI Influence Observatory are put in place amid widespread concerns that neither governments nor social media platforms currently have the will or incentives to act.

David Gilbert / Wired

Soft-Power Summit in Nara. In a symbolic display of warming ties, Japan and South Korea underscored a renewed partnership when Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and President Lee Jae Myung capped a high-stakes summit with an impromptu K-pop drum jam, using cultural diplomacy to signal alignment amid geopolitical uncertainty. After hours of talks on security, supply chains, and regional stability, the leaders played hits by BTS and from *KPop Demon Hunters* to project unity despite a fraught shared history and ideological differences, highlighting how both governments now view closer cooperation as essential in navigating China’s rising influence and an unpredictable United States, while pledging deeper collaboration on security, economic resilience, and a trilateral pact with Washington.

Javier C. Hernández / New York Times

Davos 2026 Shifts Focus to the Local Front Lines. Global economic turbulence is no longer an abstract, top-down problem but a lived reality that will test cities and local economies first, prompting leaders at Davos 2026 to pivot from broad pledges toward

preparedness, delivery, and place-based action. Amid rising geoeconomic confrontation, institutional distrust, and political “noise,” discussions at Davos emphasized that resilience, trust, and legitimacy are now built locally, through stronger urban governance, workforce investment, redesigned supply chains, and climate-ready infrastructure. New initiatives launched at the World Economic Forum underscored this shift, from city-centered innovation networks and workforce transformation efforts to financing mechanisms for urban risk and resilience, reflecting a growing consensus that communities—not nations alone—are the proving ground for economic stability and renewed trust in a fractured global order

Jeff Merritt / World Economic Forum
