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May 18, 2026 by [Andrew Dubbins](#)

Public Diplomacy in the News: U.S.-China Summit, Diplomatic Corps in Retreat, & AP's America 250 Hub ^[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.

Spectacle, strategy, and culinary diplomacy in Beijing: President Donald Trump’s lavishly choreographed visit to China underscored both the possibility of a reset in U.S.-China relations and the deep tensions that still divide the two powers over trade, Iran, and Taiwan.

Welcomed with military pageantry, state banquets, and personal flattery from Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Trump signaled a warmer tone toward Beijing even as both sides maneuvered for leverage on economic access, global security, and geopolitical influence, with China projecting itself as an increasingly confident rival at a moment when shifting global crises appear to have strengthened Xi's hand. A lavish state banquet hosted by Chinese President Xi Jinping for President Donald Trump in Beijing used food as a carefully calibrated symbol of warming relations, blending traditional Huaiyang cuisine with dishes tailored to American tastes, including roast duck, beef ribs, and elaborate desserts. The dinner underscored China's longstanding use of cuisine as a diplomatic tool, with the menu designed to project refinement, cultural confidence, and a renewed willingness to reset ties between the two powers.

Jan Camenzind Broomby / NPR; Laurie Chen and Claire Fu / Reuters

Diplomatic corps in retreat: A growing number of U.S. diplomats are leaving the State Department under President Donald Trump's administration amid what many describe as an unprecedented politicization of American foreign policy and a sharp shift toward nationalist priorities. Career foreign service officers and union leaders say policies surrounding immigration, refugees, and humanitarian aid have created deep moral and professional conflicts for longtime diplomats accustomed to serving across administrations, with some estimating the Foreign Service has shrunk by at least 20 percent as experienced officials retire or resign rather than carry out policies they no longer recognize or support. The American Foreign Service Association sharply criticized the State Department's decision to dismiss more than 200 Foreign Service members through a reduction in force, arguing the cuts removed experienced diplomats, language specialists, and crisis responders at a moment of heightened international instability, including conflict with Iran.

Michele Kelemen and Hannah Bloch / NPR; AFSA

America at 250: Associated Press's expansive America 250 hub launched as a sweeping multimedia exploration of the nation's identity ahead of its semiquincentennial, blending enterprise reporting, interactive features, quizzes, video, and visually driven storytelling into a wide-ranging portrait of the American experience. Drawing on contributions from eight newsroom departments, the project examined themes ranging from national unity, race, religion, and political division to Americana staples like baseball, ranch dressing, the Liberty Bell, and the iPhone, while the "American Objects" series and interactive features added accessible and creative entry points into the country's past and present.

Associated Press

Countdown to World Cup 2026: With one month remaining before the FIFA World Cup begins across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, the tournament is already generating controversy and global attention over soaring ticket prices, geopolitical tensions, travel restrictions, and security concerns. Debate has intensified around the cost of attendance, Iran's uncertain participation amid regional conflict, ICE raids and U.S. travel bans affecting fans, and violence concerns in parts of Mexico, even as excitement builds around debut nations such as Jordan, Cape Verde, Curaçao, and Uzbekistan and the possible final World Cup appearances of stars like Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Ben Church / CNN

Reframing orientalism at The Met: The Metropolitan Museum of Art's upcoming exhibition *Orientalism: Between Fact and Fantasy* will examine how 19th-century European and American artists engaged with, reimagined, and often exoticized the cultures of the Middle East during an era shaped by imperialism, colonialism, and expanding global exchange. Bringing together roughly 180 works across painting, photography, textiles, decorative arts, and Islamic objects, the exhibition seeks to complicate traditional understandings of Orientalism by placing Western works alongside art from the Islamic world, highlighting cultural exchange, appropriation, and the perspectives of artists such as Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi Bey, whose work challenged many Western depictions of "the East."

The Met
