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Public Diplomacy in the News: Competing Narratives in Iran, Qatar's Soccer Win & 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.

Competing narratives in the U.S.-Iran information war. As the Trump administration continues negotiations with Iran over a potential nuclear agreement, it has launched a Persian-language media campaign aimed directly at the Iranian people, portraying the country's hardships as the result of a repressive government rather than its citizens. The messaging, distributed through outlets including BBC Persian and Iran International, emphasizes freedom, opportunity, and self-determination while expressing support for ordinary Iranians following a year marked by anti-government protests, an extended internet blackout, and a harsh state crackdown. The effort reflects Washington's dual-track approach of engaging Tehran diplomatically while publicly encouraging political change from within Iran, with administration officials maintaining that any future agreement will require significant Iranian concessions on nuclear and security issues. Meanwhile in Iran, lego-style AI-generated videos produced by Explosive Media have become a powerful tool of pro-Iran messaging, using emotionally charged imagery and viral social media tactics to portray Iran as resisting American aggression while spreading disputed claims about the conflict. Experts warn that the clips represent a sophisticated new form of AI-enabled propaganda that allows governments to bypass traditional media, influence Western audiences directly, and blur the line between information, entertainment, and disinformation.

[Morgan Phillips / Fox News; Matt Shea and Laurie Kalus / BBC](#)

PSG's triumph as Qatar's soft power coup. Paris Saint-Germain's second consecutive Champions League title has cemented the club's transformation from a star-driven vanity project into one of Europe's most tactically sophisticated and entertaining teams, thanks largely to manager Luis Enrique and a young, disciplined squad led by players such as Désiré Doué and Vitinha. Yet beneath the success, the club remains a symbol of Qatar's broader soft-power ambitions, benefiting from immense state-backed resources and a model largely detached from the competitive realities of its domestic league, writes *The Guardian's* Barney Ronan. While many neutrals now admire PSG's attractive style, youth development, and cultural branding, Ronan argues that the club's appeal can obscure the political and financial forces underpinning its rise, creating a powerful illusion in which sporting excellence and image-making merge into a highly effective form of modern influence.

[Barney Ronan / The Guardian](#)

Cuba's medical missions face growing pushback. Cuba's long-running medical missions,

a cornerstone of its international influence and a major source of foreign revenue, are facing mounting challenges as several Latin American countries—including Honduras, Jamaica, Guatemala, Guyana, and Venezuela—move to cancel or scale back agreements for Cuban healthcare workers. The decisions follow pressure from the Trump administration, which has condemned the program as exploitative labor and imposed visa restrictions on officials connected to it. Supporters argue the missions provide vital healthcare in underserved communities, while critics, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, contend that many participants face coercive working conditions, restricted freedoms, and limited compensation. Former Cuban medical workers interviewed by CNN described the missions as both an economic opportunity and a source of disillusionment, reflecting the broader debate over whether the brigades represent humanitarian solidarity, political influence, or a combination of both.

Stefano Pozzebon / CNN

Donald Cofman's life in public diplomacy. Donald Bruce Cofman devoted more than three decades to representing and explaining the United States abroad, building a distinguished career in public diplomacy that took him to six countries, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. A Foreign Service officer and former journalist, he became known for his skill as a communicator, bridge-builder, and advocate for international understanding, serving as spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Israel during the Gulf War and helping establish the first U.S. Embassy in newly independent Azerbaijan. Cofman combined professional dedication with a strong commitment to family, remaining active throughout retirement until his death on May 6, 2026, at age 87.

Ellen Braunstein / Washington Jewish Week

World Cup expansion and records in focus. As the 2026 FIFA World Cup prepares to debut its expanded 48-team format across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, attention is turning not only to the contenders and newcomers but also to the tournament records that may fall. The larger field and increased number of matches are expected to shatter records for total goals scored and could help France manager Didier Deschamps surpass the all-time mark for World Cup victories by a coach. Individual milestones are also within reach, with Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappé chasing Miroslav Klose's career World Cup scoring record and Spain's teenage star Lamine Yamal emerging as a candidate to become the youngest Golden Boot or Golden Ball winner in tournament history. Other marks, such as David Villa's longest-range World Cup goal, may prove more difficult to break, while records like Pelé's status as the youngest World Cup scorer and Hungary's 10–1 victory over El Salvador are likely to remain untouched despite the expanded competition.

ESPN
