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Aug 24, 2026 by [Andrew Dubbins](#)

Public Diplomacy in the News: Rugby Statecraft, Rebuilding the UN, & Sealskin Diplomacy ^[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.

Rugby as statecraft. Australia is turning sport, migration and security cooperation into tools of influence across the Pacific as it seeks to remain the region’s preferred partner over China. Central to the strategy is a \$600 million agreement supporting Papua New Guinea’s entry into Australia’s National Rugby League, alongside deeper defense ties, military recruitment,

expanded visas and highly symbolic gestures such as Pacific leaders attending major rugby matches with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Australian officials argue that rugby league gives Canberra a cultural connection Beijing cannot easily replicate, strengthening people-to-people ties while supporting broader diplomatic and security goals. The approach has helped underpin new treaties with Papua New Guinea and Fiji, but it also reflects intensifying strategic competition with China, whose expanding political and security presence remains a major concern for Australian policymakers.

Finn McHugh / Politico

Rebuilding the U.N.'s relevance. The next U.N. Secretary-General will inherit an organization weakened by geopolitical rivalry, financial strain and declining confidence in multilateral diplomacy, making political skill and pragmatic crisis management more important than sweeping institutional reform. Major powers have repeatedly blocked Security Council action, U.S. funding cuts have deepened budget pressures, and governments increasingly turn to smaller groups such as the G7 and BRICS instead of the U.N. With eight candidates currently seeking to succeed António Guterres, the incoming leader will need to maintain working relationships with rival powers while reasserting the U.N.'s role in conflict prevention and mediation. Rather than promising idealistic global cooperation, the strongest strategy may be to present the U.N. as a neutral forum for reducing shared risks, bringing divided governments together on wars, pandemics, technology and other cross-border challenges without adding more bureaucracy.

Time / Richard Gowan and Daniel Forti

Sealskin diplomacy in Greenland. A Trump-aligned Texas energy company is urging the United States to lift its decades-old ban on sealskin imports as a way to improve relations with Greenland while advancing broader American economic and strategic interests in the Arctic. Greenland Energy argues that allowing Greenlandic hunters to sell seal products in the U.S. could generate income for remote communities and ease resentment over President Trump's repeated interest in bringing the Danish territory under U.S. control, even as the company pursues potentially lucrative oil drilling there. Some Greenlandic leaders say ending the ban would be welcomed, though they also view the proposal as an overt effort to win local support, while animal-welfare advocates warn against using seals as leverage in geopolitical bargaining. The initiative illustrates how commercial interests, Indigenous livelihoods and U.S. competition for influence in Greenland are increasingly intertwined.

Ilya Gridneff and Richard Milne / Financial Times

China's soft-power resurgence. Chinese culture is enjoying renewed popularity among young Americans, from booming mahjong clubs and Chinese travel content to the social-media trend of "Chinamaxxing," giving Beijing new opportunities to strengthen its cultural influence abroad. Positive views of China have risen from pandemic-era lows, particularly among younger Americans, while Chinese officials and state media have eagerly promoted growing enthusiasm for the country's traditions, technology and lifestyle. Critics warn, however, that much of this fascination presents an idealized version of China that overlooks economic challenges, human rights abuses and authoritarian surveillance, while researchers suggest the trend may also reflect broader American dissatisfaction and Gen Z's desire for community, novelty and alternatives to digital life.

Ann Scott Tyson / Christian Science Monitor

Fast-tracking Olympic construction. Los Angeles is moving to streamline construction for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games by exempting certain temporary projects from normal planning and zoning requirements. The City Council approved the ordinance 13-0, allowing facilities such as training sites, fan zones and security perimeters to move forward more quickly ahead of the Games. Supporters say the exemptions are necessary to ensure Los Angeles can successfully deliver the events, while neighborhood groups warn that the measure is overly broad and could potentially allow projects initially presented as temporary to become permanent without standard zoning review. The ordinance now heads to Mayor Karen Bass for final approval.

Makenna Cramer / LAist
