

Headlines:

- **Saudi Arabia Spent at least \$1.5bn on 'Sportswashing'**
- **Taliban Believe They Have Already Won**
- **Sisi's Incompetence**

Details:

Saudi Arabia Spent at least \$1.5bn on 'Sportswashing'

Saudi Arabia has spent at least \$1.5bn on high-profile international sporting events in a bid to bolster its reputation, a new report reveals. The oil-rich nation has invested millions across the sporting world, the report by the human rights organisation Grant Liberty says, from chess championships to golf, tennis and \$60m alone on the Saudi Cup, the world's richest horse-racing event with prize money of \$20m. The report, also details the Kingdom's \$650m ten-year deal with Formula One, whose world championships begin this Sunday and for the first time will include a race in the port city of Jeddah. Grant Liberty's analysis outlines the momentous scale of Saudi Arabia's investments in what they term "sportswashing," the practice of investing or hosting sporting events in a bid to obscure the Kingdom's poor human rights record, and tout itself as a new leading global venue for tourism and events.

Taliban Believe They Have Already Won

In the week when Taliban's deputy leader, Sirajuddin Haqqani, said the Taliban has defeated the enemy Afghanistan's Tolo News reported that the Biden administration has asked the Taliban to agree to a continued US presence in Afghanistan for three or six months past May 1st. After Biden's comments, the Taliban responded and warned if US troops remain in the country past May 1st that they would be targeted. Since the Doha Agreement was signed, the Taliban has lived up to its commitment not to attack US forces. February 8th marked the first full year that no US troops died in combat in Afghanistan since the war started. The question is if Biden will choose to stay past May 1st without the approval of the Taliban, which would likely mean an escalation of the almost 20-year-old war. What is for certain is that it's not the US, but the Taliban that have the upper hand in any negotiations.

Sisi's Incompetence

Whilst much of the world's watched the problems caused by the closure of the Suez Canal due to a mega ship hitting groups when a dust storm was taking place. The regime response was nowhere to be seen. In Egypt for 26 hours, there was not a word about the closed canal, the shipping backing up in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, or of the Ever Given itself. Instead, the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) issued a media statement announcing the successful transit of an Italian cruise ship with 65 Covid-19 cases aboard. There was a media blackout. And a day later that the lying started, with the first official statement noting that efforts were "continuing to reopen the canal". The SCA downplayed the impacts on navigation, sending a "message of assurance that the navigation will continue as usual". The authority warned journalists not to heed any news or rumours about the most serious incident to block the canal since the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. On Thursday, two days after the chaos had started, the SCA officially announced that navigation had been suspended. The incompetence of Sisi's regime has already made Egypt a difficult place to live, but now his incompetence threatens a major international waterway.