

Headlines:

- **The Taliban Strike Back**
- **The Beautiful Game Turns Ugly**
- **Muslims Defend Christians in Kenya**

Details:

The Taliban Strike Back

On the 21st of December 2015, after hours of fierce clashes that cost the lives of more than 90 soldiers in 2 days the Taliban captured Sangin District, located in the east of Helmand province. The fall of Sangin comes just a day after the deputy Governor of Helmand province requested military aid from the government of Afghanistan to hold back the Taliban stating that "Helmand is on the brink". It is fast approaching one year since the US-led NATO mission in Afghanistan transitioned into an Afghan-led operation, but already the cracks are visible. After 14 years of war, not only does the Taliban yet breathe, but seem to be capable of regaining large portions of the country at ease, taking full advantage of lack lustre Afghan security forces. The seizure of Sangin and the subsequent panic in the Afghan government would only signal to be the first of many acquisitions. Barack Obama, announced in October that thousands of US troops would remain in Afghanistan past 2016, back-peddling on previous plans to shrink the force, signalling that the Afghan forces, although trained by NATO were not ready to stand alone.

The Beautiful Game Turns Ugly

On the 20th December 2015, the footballing world was left in shock as the FIFA Ethics Committee decided to ban current FIFA President Sepp Blatter and the current UEFA President Michel Platini. This was down to "disloyal payments" of £1.3m (\$2m) which were made by Sepp Blatter to Michel Platini in 2011 without a written agreement. Platini claimed that this payment was in exchange for "work" carried out between 2008 and 2011, but no evidence has been disclosed and many have doubted the truthfulness of the reasons provided. This ban has been levied on the background of ongoing investigation by the FBI into scandals that have taken place in FIFA. This has already seen the arrest of 7 big FIFA officials, with many more under investigation. It is naive to think of football as an "untainted, beautiful game" as ultimately, it is the greed of individuals which was allowed to filter through the organisation that gave rise to such scandals. The various powers within FIFA, motivated by their desire to fill their pockets facilitated various financial scandals despite adopting an altruistic outlook to their work. For example, their claims of handing World Cup 2012 to South Africa in order to create economic opportunities has come under severe scrutiny as leaks demonstrated that payments were made by South Africa to Concacaf prior to bidding, which were ultimately accepted by FIFA. This puts into question the very ethos of organisations like FIFA and UEFA and demonstrates the beautiful game of football is never independent of the ugly organisations that facilitate its play.

Muslims Defend Christians in Kenya

Al-Shabaab attempted to ambush a bus in Kenya on Monday, Dec 21, but were stopped when a group of Muslims shielded the Christian passengers and told the attackers they were prepared to die together. The bus was headed to the city of Mandera, near the border with Somalia and Ethiopia. The journey is such a security risk that most buses travel with a police escort. In this case, however, the police car broke down and the bus continued on its journey. The group regularly storms buses, particularly this time of the year, one of the busiest travel seasons in the nation. Throngs make their way to relatives' homes for the holidays, with buses and other public transportation packed. In one such attack last year, they raided a bus and shot dead 28 people who failed to recite Quran verses.