



# Under The Radar

*A dive into the news  
you might have missed*



**TRAFALGAR** STRATEGY

# Saudi Sportwashing

## *What happened?*

This week it emerged that the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), warned Boris Johnson via text that relations between the two countries would be damaged if the government did not intervene to allow a £300m takeover of Newcastle United by the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF).

The text from MBS to Boris Johnson, sent on June 27, read: “We expect the English Premier League to reconsider and correct its wrong conclusion”, after the Crown Prince was enraged that the Premier League demanded to know if the Saudi state — in effect, Bin Salman himself — would be the owners of Newcastle.

## *What does it mean?*

The agreement for the PIF to buy Newcastle was made in April last year before the Premier League held up the deal, leading to the consortium withdrawing their bid. But the lobbying of Boris Johnson by MBS shows how important the Saudis believed the purchase of Newcastle United to be.

The UAE has already invested heavily in transforming Manchester City into a global power, whilst Qatar’s involvement with Paris Saint-Germain has seen them part with eye-watering sums for global superstars like Neymar and Mbappe.

No wonder then, that the Saudis saw the value in purchasing a club of Newcastle’s historic stature in order to compete on a global stage with Qatar and the UAE. And whilst that motivation may account for some of the reasoning behind the failed takeover attempt, the desire to “sportswash” was undoubtedly the biggest factor. Amnesty International’s UK director, Kate Allen, said the bid was “a blatant example of Saudi sportswashing.”

Although the takeover subsequently collapsed, it serves to highlight the geopolitical prism that football is increasingly being viewed through by states looking to burnish their own reputations and bury their own human rights records through sportwashing – buying goodwill through outstanding sporting success and the cultural capital that comes with it.

Taken in the wider context of Saudi Arabia’s already-extensive sportwashing programme, the £300m they intended to spend on Newcastle would have been a drop in the ocean. Last month, a report by human rights organisation Grant Liberty revealed that Saudi Arabia has already spent at least \$1.5bn on high-profile international sporting events.

Saudi Arabia’s commitment to sportwashing, coupled with the similar practices already employed by Qatar and the UAE, should be of much greater concern to anyone concerned about human rights abuses. And, with the Qatar World Cup on the horizon, there seems to be no end in sight.

# 'Angry reacts' to Zuckerberg's plans

## *What happened?*

Over thirty five child safety research and campaign groups penned a letter to urge Mark Zuckerberg to abandon plans to develop a version of Instagram for under 13-year olds.

The letter warned that extending Instagram, with its relentless focus on appearance, self-presentation and branding would not be in children's best interests. It accused Zuckerberg of trying to hook children onto Facebook products, collecting their data and putting them at risk of groomers.

## *What does it mean?*

The signatories of this letter join a long list of individuals and organisations who have already spoken out against Instagram Junior. When BuzzFeed first reported on Facebook's plan to create the site in March, MPs across all parties expressed concern. Jeremy Hunt slammed the decision to target children as "deeply cynical for a company that claims to be a force for good" and called on ministers to ban the app.

It's a common story in history that the powers-that-be try to resist technological change because they don't understand it and worry it challenges their own status. Zuckerberg's 2018 appearance in front of the US Congress made it clear that most politicians have little clue about social media, making it easy to dismiss any concerns that MPs might raise. But in the case of Instagram Junior, Jeremy Hunt is entirely justified in his intervention.

Swept away by the promise of a platform for all voices and communities among strangers, society marched full steam ahead into social media. The uglier reality of these sites - anonymous trolling, toxic echo chambers, a loss of privacy and an unrelenting pressure to perform - were discovered too late, long after how we interact with each other and our media permanently shifted. The only hope for reform is for older generations to be more wary of social media and not allow the dependency to continue among their children.

But the pace of Parliament is no match for Silicon Valley, where money is poured into new start-ups and technologies every day. That's why it's of vital importance that our elected officials are extra alert to and proactive about developments in the tech space.

# Rising Tensions, Rising Temperatures

## *What happened?*

John Kerry arrived in China on Wednesday, becoming the first high-ranking member of the Biden administration to visit the country. The White House's climate envoy is discussing "raising global climate ambition" ahead of a virtual summit that President Biden plans to host for world leaders later this month. At the time of writing, Xi Jinping has not yet accepted the President's invitation.

Kerry will meet his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua, the special climate envoy who was chief negotiator in the talks that led to the Paris agreement. The pair worked closely together during those negotiations and have stayed in touch since Biden took office.

But climate change isn't the only item on the White House's agenda, with the State Department also sending a delegation of former American officials, including two former deputy secretaries of state, to visit Taiwan. The move prompted criticism from Beijing before Kerry's plane had even landed.

## *What does it mean?*

To bring planet earth back from the brink of a climate catastrophe, the U.S. and China need to work together.

Collectively, the two countries account for 40% of greenhouse gas emissions, meaning that any concrete action would need a radical overhaul of the world's largest economies. China, in particular, accounts for a whopping 27% - meaning Biden's plan to meet the 1.5 degrees Celsius planetary warming goal, which is necessary to avoid disaster, largely rests on Beijing.

*"Such brinkmanship is wasting crucial time in the fight against rising temperatures"*

Thankfully for the rest of us, climate change is one of the more amicable aspects of U.S. - Sino relations. Under President Trump and his policies of climate change denial, America pulled back from leading the world in combatting climate-related changes, allowing China to step up and become a global leader on climate change policy. Understandably, this has raised some hopes for bipartisanship now Biden has entered the White House.

But while Biden is happy to hold hands on climate change, by refusing to be pushed around on Taiwan, China is unlikely to join America in a united front on climate change. When it comes to these geopolitical issues, from human rights to territorial claims, neither superpower is willing to move.

Such brinkmanship is wasting crucial time in the fight against rising temperatures, time we may not have.

# This Weeks Must Reads

## The rise and fall of Canary Wharf

[WIRED](#)

“London’s iconic financial district is trying to reinvent itself as a place to work and play after the pandemic. But the numbers don’t add up”  
- Margaret Taylor on the future of Canary Wharf.

## The vanishing billionaire: how Jack Ma fell foul of Xi Jinping

[Financial Times](#)

“Alibaba founder’s dramatic rise and fall illustrates China’s wary embrace of tycoons who power economic growth”  
- Ryan McMorro and Sun Yu on Jack Ma.

## Out of thin air: the mystery of the man who fell from the sky

[The Guardian](#)

“In 2019, the body of a man fell from a passenger plane into a garden in south London. Who was he?”  
- Sirin Kale on the Kenya Airways stowaway.

## US withdrawal from Afghanistan: Return to barbarism is all but certain

[The Times](#)

“For most of Afghanistan’s 39 million people, the US withdrawal will only heighten dread of what will follow”  
- Hugh Tomlinson on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.



**TRAFALGAR** STRATEGY

What we do

**CORPORATE  
COMMUNICATIONS**



**CAMPAIGNING**



**CRISIS  
MANAGEMENT**



**PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS**



**LITIGATION**



**DIGITAL**



**CHARITY**



For more information about Trafalgar Strategy  
and our services, get in touch:

Email:

[info@trafalgar-strategy.co.uk](mailto:info@trafalgar-strategy.co.uk)

Phone:

+44 (0)207 043 1308

Or visit:

[www.trafalgar-strategy.co.uk](http://www.trafalgar-strategy.co.uk)

Twitter:

[@trafalgarstrat](https://twitter.com/trafalgarstrat)