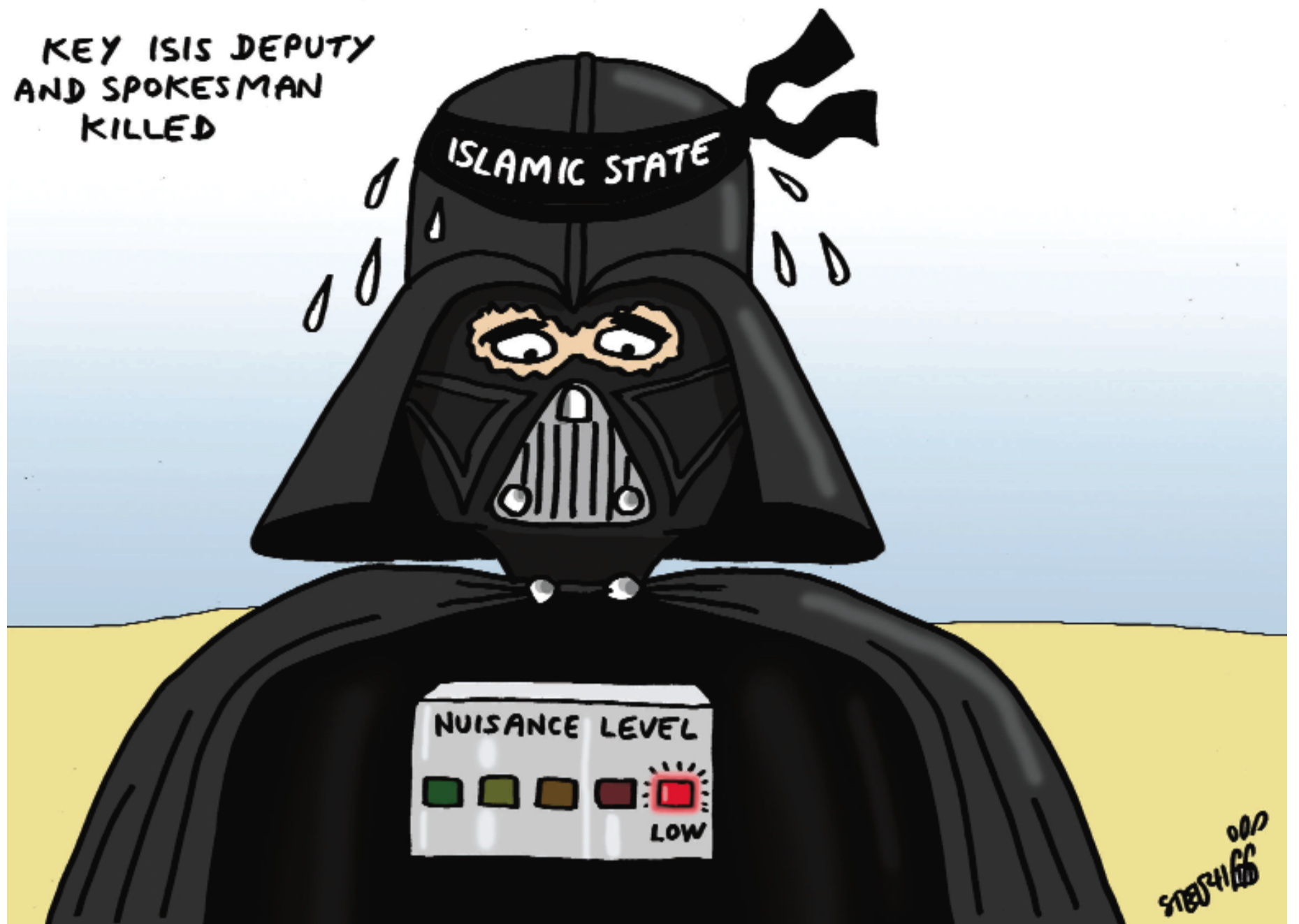


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## DEATH OF IS TACTICIAN COMES AT CRITICAL MOMENT

By Samia Nakhoul and Angus McDowall

The US air strike believed to have killed Abu Mohammad Al-Adnani has deprived Islamic State of the architect of its attacks on the West, as it faces the loss of swathes of its heartlands. One of the last survivors of the Al-Qaeda militants who originally formed Islamic State last decade in Iraq, including its self-appointed caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, Adnani had risen to become one of its most influential leaders.

"It's a major morale and propaganda blow to the group because it shows that their top leadership is being targeted by an effective and organised chain," Brig Gen Yahya Rasool, spokesman for the joint operations command of Iraq's army, told Reuters in Baghdad. Not only did Adnani orchestrate Islamic State's propaganda effort, an undertaking at the heart of its quest to lay waste modern nation states, but he also served as one of its principle military planners. If his death is confirmed, those skills will be hard to replace, even in a group as resilient as Islamic State, after a series of territorial losses and killings of top leaders.

In recent months Islamic State's losses in Iraq have mounted. Fallujah has fallen in the west and Iraqi forces have captured key approaches to Mosul, the ancient Tigris city whose fall in 2014 signalled the group's lightning rise. Meanwhile, advances by a US-backed coalition in Syria have all but cut Islamic State off from the Turkish border, after the loss of the key town of Manbij, and started to press into its Euphrates valley heartland.

Few people expect further advances against Islamic State to be rapid or straightforward, but the group's enemies have built a clear momentum in both Iraq and Syria that has pushed it to adopt a strategy of attacks overseas. Adnani was the man behind that policy, demonstrating an ideological and tactical flexibility that allowed the group first to capitalise on its seizure of land, and then to adapt as it was forced to retreat.

In doing so, Islamic State has made a switch in emphasis from its dreams of unifying all Muslims under a single, militant caliphate, to an older jihadist strategy of striking terror into its enemies by attacking them in their own countries. But it has done this partly by harnessing shock tactics and social media to inspire and guide attacks by radicalised amateurs, rather than rely solely upon the highly trained but cumbersome militant cells of an earlier era. This, in part, was Adnani's legacy.

## Apocalyptic Prophecy

Islamic State said on Tuesday Adnani was killed "while surveying the operations to repel the military campaigns

against Aleppo. It pledged to avenge his death but did not disclose details on how he died or who was killed with him. A US defense official told Reuters the United States targeted Adnani on Tuesday in a strike on a vehicle travelling in the Syrian town of Al-Bab. He stopped short of confirming Adnani's death, however. Such US assessments often take days and often lag behind official announcements by militant groups.

Adnani's presence in the Aleppo countryside may reflect its strategic and symbolic importance to Islamic State. The northwest has become both the most active theatre of Syria's war and an arena for competing regional and global powers. The government and mainstream rebel groups, which between them hold most of Syria's western, most populous, regions, have focused on their battle for control of Aleppo, Syria's biggest city before the war, and a strategic prize.

But to the north and east, a secondary conflict has played out as US-backed Kurdish fighters and Turkey-backed rebels,

who are also fighting each other, have squeezed IS' once expansive tracts along the Turkish border and Euphrates basin. These advances have all but cut off Islamic State from its last foothold on the Turkish border, its link to new foreign recruits, while a steady push from the north has brought its enemies to within 30 km of its Syrian capital Raqqa.

But these strategic setbacks are not Islamic State's only interest in the Aleppo countryside: Just 30 km northwest of Al-Bab, where Adnani was reportedly killed in an airstrike after arriving to tour the battlefield, is the village of Dabiq. A few streets surrounded by fields, it will be the site, says Islamic prophecy, of a final battle between Muslims and infidels that will herald the apocalypse. So important is this event in Islamic State propaganda, of which Adnani was the chief, that Dabiq was the name chosen for its online magazine that sought to inspire new recruits to its militant cause and instruct them in the ways of global jihad.

## HAMMERED

Hammered by two years of US-led coalition air strikes and military losses on the ground, Adnani increasingly called in audio messages for attacks against the United States and Western countries. His group said it was behind deadly attacks in Paris, Nice and Brussels. The shift was partly born of tactical necessity after Western and regional governments made it harder for would-be militants to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the group. "If the tyrants close the door of migration in your faces, then open the door of jihad in theirs and turn their actions against them," he said in an audio clip.

Born in 1977 as Taha Subhi Falaha in Syria's Idlib Province southwest of Aleppo, he pledged allegiance to Islamic State's predecessor, Al-Qaeda, more than a decade ago and was once imprisoned by US forces in Iraq. He left Syria to travel to Iraq to fight US forces there after its 2003 invasion, and only returned to his homeland after the start of its own civil war in 2011, a person who knew his family said. A biography posted on militant websites says he grew up with a "love of mosques" and was a prolific reader.

A US counter-terrorism official who monitors Islamic State said Adnani's death would hurt the militants "in the area that increasingly concerns us as the group loses more and more of its caliphate and its financial base ... and turns to mounting and inspiring more attacks in Europe, Southeast Asia and elsewhere". Hisham Al-Hashimi, a Baghdad-based security analyst that advises the Iraqi government on IS affairs, said: "As a military target, Adnani is less important than (ex-war minister Omar) Al-Shishani... (killed earlier this year in Iraq). His death is mainly a blow to their morale, he is the one who inspires the fighters to join in Syria." — Reuters



Abu Mohammad Al-Adnani

## LONE CHILDREN SEEKING UK ASYLUM RISING

By Lin Taylor

When Alan, a British foster parent, first took in a teenager who had fled poverty and political repression in Eritrea, the boy was so scarred by his journey to the UK that he barely spoke. Then 16, the boy was smuggled into Britain underneath a truck nursing a broken arm, having fallen from the vehicle somewhere in France. Five years on, the traumatized teenager was now a 21-year-old man with a home of his own in Kent, southeast England. And when Alan walked into the young man's housewarming party, it was one of the proudest moments as a foster parent.

"We all went to his moving-in party and it was fantastic," said Alan, who declined to give his full name to protect other foster children in his care. "When they arrive, they're so anxious and frightened. And to see them feel more at home and making friends, that is so rewarding. They are the standout moments," Alan said in a phone interview with the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The British father of six and his partner have been fostering unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Kent for nearly seven years, looking after teenagers from Iran, Iraq, Vietnam, Albania and currently a 17-year-old boy from Afghanistan. As difficult as it is to gain their trust and to support them as they adjust to a new life in Britain, it is nothing compared with the journey these children have taken, Alan said. "Some witnessed a member of their

family being killed or arrested. They might have been trafficked. They're all traumatized when they get here," he said.

## Overstretched

As Europe grapples with its worst refugee crisis since World War Two, the need for British foster carers and support services is greater than ever, charities and government officials say. In 2015, nearly 96,000 lone children sought asylum in the European Union, almost four times as many as the previous year, according to the European Asylum Support Office. In Britain alone, 3,472 children applied for asylum in the 12 months to June this year, an increase of 54 percent compared with the previous year which had 2,252 claims. The highest number of claims came from children arriving from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Iran.

Foster carers hosted 2,630 asylum-seeking children in 2015, a 29 percent increase on 2014 (2,030) and a 35 percent increase on 2013 (1,940), according to government data. Although the number of people wishing to foster child asylum seekers continues to grow, there are not enough legal aid, mental health services or schooling for new arrivals, charity workers said. "The social services are greatly stretched. The whole situation is a bit difficult in Kent for young people and for the council as well," said Asma Salah, a British Red Cross case-worker in one of the main arrival points for migrants crossing the English Channel.

As the closest British county to Calais, where

hundreds of child migrants have ended up living in squalid camps, Kent is on the frontlines of refugee arrivals in the UK with 825 unaccompanied minors in its care as of Aug 22, compared with 730 last September. Under the Children Act 1989, British councils have a legal responsibility to care for children who arrive from abroad, seeking asylum.

Though new arrivals have dropped, Kent council says it is struggling to support the children they have in their system, and has urged other local authorities to take in some minors through a voluntary dispersal scheme launched in July. With around 20 young people dispersed so far, and very few councils expressing interest to resettle them, Peter Oakford, Kent's councillor in charge of children's services, said the scheme should be mandatory. "The dispersal program really isn't any good. We can't even get a list of local authorities from government that have signed up to participate," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

But the head of the local government's refugee taskforce, David Simmonds said the interests of the child would be better served if councils were not forced to take them in. Simmonds, who recently returned from his first visit to Calais, said British local authorities were doing a reasonable job with limited resources. "The big challenge is if there's going to be a very significant increase in numbers," he added.

## Best Interest of the Child

Rape, forced labor, beatings and death are

just some of the dangers faced by children travelling without their parents, the UN children's agency, UNICEF, says. Given the risk of abuse, UNICEF said Britain should do more to resettle lone children stranded in Calais and across Europe. "There should be more resettlement places for those children whose best interest is to be in the UK, along with legal routes like family reunion," said Melanie Teff, policy advisor at UNICEF UK. "We're not saying the UK should take every unaccompanied child in Europe but ... we're dealing with a global refugee crisis and the UK needs to step up and play its part in responsibility sharing for that."

For Joanne in Kent, fostering a child asylum seeker for the first time in November was a natural response to the refugee crisis. "I just don't think there's enough people willing to open their homes within the UK to the real problems that are out there," said Joanne, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "There's a lot of ignorance. I do believe that a lot of people have no understanding of these children - and they really don't understand that they've had a horrific journey coming here."

Alan said despite the challenges, he will continue to take in unaccompanied children as long as there is a need. "We're embracing them and giving them a big cuddle, so to speak. We want to guide them, show kindness and let them know that they've got somebody here that they can rely on." — Reuters

## Focus

ELECTIONS, RUNNING  
CLOCK FRUSTRATE  
OBAMA TRADE DEALS

By Paul Handley

US President Barack Obama's two most ambitious trade deals appear increasingly in trouble, victims of electoral politics at home and in Europe and a ticking clock on his administration. Neither the Trans-Pacific Partnership nor the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is dead, but analysts say the hurdles to getting either completed by the end of Obama's term next January 20 are now almost insurmountable.

For the TPP, already negotiated with 11 other Pacific Rim countries and only needing ratification by the Congress, the political atmosphere has been soured with both presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, pitching for votes, saying they are opposed to it. As for TTIP - a treaty with the entire European Union - negotiations are stuck on the toughest issues and European politicians, facing elections next year, are likewise declaring opposition.

French President Francois Hollande said Tuesday that TTIP talks "will not lead to an agreement by the end of the year," and hours earlier his junior minister for trade Matthias Fekl called for an end to the talks. "There is no more political support in France for these negotiations," he said. And in Germany, vice chancellor and economy minister Sigmar Gabriel said the talks "have de facto failed".

While negotiators from both sides quickly responded that the talks were certainly alive and making progress, analysts said both TTIP and TPP would likely be stalled to at least 2018. "The clock has basically run out," said Gary Hufbauer, a trade expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. "I agree more with the 'more dead than alive' camp in this debate," he told AFP.

Not a big free trade advocate before he was first elected in 2008, Obama has strongly pursued what he has called "trade deals for the 21st century". Each would dwarf any previous free trade treaty, going beyond cutting goods tariffs to establish rules governing data trade, investment rights, intellectual property rights and other issues not covered in past deals. Both deals were set up to be negotiated largely in secret and be presented to respective governments and legislatures as completed deals for up-or-down votes.

## Hot Issue

The 12 TPP countries reached agreement in Oct 2015, and the main challenge to implementing it is ratification by the US Congress. But with opponents arguing that previous trade deals have cost US jobs, TPP has become a hot issue ahead of the US presidential and congressional elections coming on Nov 8. TTIP has not figured much in the US campaign, but this week's comments show it will in the French and German elections next year. "Election periods are always not good times for trade agreements," Hufbauer told AFP.

Moreover, relative to TPP, the TTIP talks have been rushed, and have been tripped up by Britain's June vote to withdraw from the European Union, potentially removing a key US ally from the deal. "It was never going to be easy between the US and the EU because basically you have the two elephants (of global trade) negotiating with each other," said Frances Burwell at the Atlantic Council. Obama has a chance to move both deals forward before leaving office. He could submit TPP to Congress for ratification after the election, and before the new Congress takes office in early January, when legislators could vote with less political pressure.

But Daniel Ikenson, a trade expert at the Cato Institute, gives that "about a one percent chance" of succeeding. "I think the votes are really not there," he said, with the normally pro-free trade Republican Party deeply divided. Obama could also drive his chief trade negotiator, Michael Froman, to finish a TTIP deal before he exits. But that could require big US compromises, which could create a political firestorm for his successor. "There is some chance that we will be very close to what is known as a political agreement by the end of Obama's term, but it's dicey. It's not a sure thing," said Burwell.

Both deals, then, are almost certain to be left to the next president, widely expected to be Clinton. As Obama's secretary of state she supported the negotiating effort but has opposed TPP on the campaign trail. Never mind that, said Ikenson. "Presidential candidates tend to be more populist and more anti-trade. Presidents themselves see the light... Clinton will find a way to support it." Trump is more of a cipher, with his campaign advisors including some anti-trade ideologues, noted Ikenson. But even then, existing laws and industry pressure could force a president Trump into supporting the deals, he posited. —AFP

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