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Classified By: Acting Political Chief John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and

(d).

1. (C) Summary: In a June 2 meeting with PRT officers, new Governor Adnan al-Zurfi presented himself as the consensus candidate to move Najaf past the era of political infighting. He cited as evidence his decisions to keep most ISCI-affiliated civil servants in positions appointed by the previous governor, cede important Provincial Council committees to ISCI members, and make no dramatic changes in the province, particularly in the first 60 days. Zurfi also stated his commitment to critical reforms in Najaf on the administrative front and to eradicate Iranian and Syrian intelligence networks. While Zurfi stands to make a difference in security, his claim to be the man to bridge Shi'a political differences in Najaf and execute necessary reform is dubious considering his long-standing acrimony with ISCI and his fragile and fractious coalition in the Provincial Council. End Summary.

2. (C) Zurfi, an American citizen who owes the first phase



of his political career to his CPA appointment as Najaf Governor in 2004 and the second phase to an important intelligence position in the Ministry of Interior as a Maliki loyalist, was frank, direct, and systematic with the PRT. He spoke in fluent English and without any advisors present. He first recounted his recent separate meetings with the Najaf marja'iyah, the four top Shi'a Grand Ayatollahs headlined by Ali al-Sistani. Details of these meetings will be provided septel. Zurfi then proceeded to present his consensus-oriented ideas on the political situation, security, investment, reconstruction projects, and education.

"I Won't Do to Them What They Did to Me."

3. (C) Adnan al-Zurfi recounted his bitter version of the 2005 transition from his CPA-appointed administration to the ISCI-dominated provincial government led by former Governor Asaad Abu Gelal and Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Abtan. Zurfi claimed that Asaad and Abtan not only fired all of his staff and appointees but assassinated and drove out many of his top political allies. He affirmed to PRT officers that he would keep many of ISCI's appointees to provincial positions and said, "I'm going to show them something different." When queried on ISCI-appointed Najaf Reconstruction Committee Chairman Haider al-Mayali, he said he had his trust and would continue to work for him as he had the previous administration. He also added that ISCI would hold the three PC committees they requested: legal affairs, agriculture, and anti-corruption.

4. (C) To contrast his message of harmony to the actions of his predecessors, he informed PRT officers that Asaad took all of the furniture from the governor's office and adjacent residence, as well as refused to return the armada of vehicles he acquired as governor. Zurfi added that Asaad kept up vitriolic rhetoric against him during the final days of the political negotiations, telling a thousand-person crowd of mourners at the funeral of a popular religious cleric that Zurfi was an American agent who would return Najaf to the political upheaval and violence of 2004. Breaking from his message of truce with ISCI, Zurfi finished the topic by telling PRT officers that former Deputy Governor Abtan once remarked in 2005 he would send Zurfi back to America. Zurfi smiled smugly and said, "I will send Abtan back to Iran."

Sadrists and Committee Chairmen

5. (C) When asked about his two Deputy Governors, Sadrists Q5. (C) When asked about his two Deputy Governors, Sadrists First Deputy Muhsin Shareef Razaq and Jaafari-affiliated Second Deputy Hassan Hamza al Zubaidi, Zurfi said that the two would remain active 24 hours a day with a list of



assignments from him. Though Zurfi described Muhsin Shareef as more a middleman than a tried and true Sadrist, he demurred when asked if the First Deputy would meet with Americans, and admitted, "He's afraid." He strongly stated that both deputies were close to him as personal friends since the mid-eighties.

Najaf Airport and Investment

6. (C) Governor Zurfi methodically ran down a list of critical reconstruction projects and economic development issues, showing a command of the ongoing problems with the Najaf International Airport and the need for his personal involvement. He made specific comments against the ISCI-picked Kuwaiti management firm Al Aqeeq and their ability to appropriately run and develop the airport. He

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acknowledged that tension existed between Baghdad authorities and the province and stated there was an offer on the table from the Ministry of Transportation to financially support the airport if the province and investor could not meet all of the airport's needs in order to operate at full capacity. Zurfi called the Najaf Investment Commission uneducated and in need of new blood. He singled out the chairman, whom he referred to as an agriculture expert out of his league as a businessman, and also criticized other commission members. He reiterated the importance of international and domestic investors in Najaf's development and specifically called on the need for a new investment law to settle land ownership issues and encourage more investment.

On Security: "Patience"

7. (C) Zurfi carefully described several changes he intended to make regarding Najaf's security sphere but underlined several times that all of his changes would be implemented slowly and carefully over the next year. His biggest concern was the operation of "Iranian and Syrian intelligence networks" in Najaf and he mentioned his desire to create a separate intelligence fusion cell under his auspices to work with U.S. forces and all of the Iraqi Security Force entities in Najaf. Zurfi admitted, however, that using provincial money on such a new operation was "possibly illegal."

8. (C) When directly asked about changing the Director General of Police, former Badr commander and close Abtan associate Major General Abdul Kareem al-Mayahi, he firmly replied in one word: "Patience." Zurfi added that Abdul Kareem was not to be the first official replaced in the province and that the short-term focus remained the



department managers and mid-level police commanders who did not have the experience and skills to be in their positions. He added again that the process of changes in the security apparatus will take time, and some reforms will not be possible until after the parliamentary elections.

9. (C) Zurfi continues to regard renegade Badr and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) elements as continuing to act on Iranian behalf and thus threats to the province and to U.S. elements in Najaf. He said Abtan had given uniforms, badges, and police vehicles to violent people and that these resources were used in the recent attack on American forces. He said strongly that he has proof about Iranian activities but will exercise restraint in going after some of the guilty parties. Zurfi also said, "I wish I could tell you that the Najaf Sadrists were all non-violent, peaceful people, but I know that some of them continue to plot for the destabilization of Najaf and attacks on you."

Comment

10. (C) Zurfi confidently covered many of Najaf's primary issues and showed a command of the province's needs and available resources after only a couple of weeks in power. Many of his comments, particularly the need for comprehensive consensus from the political parties on all programs, especially ISCI, as well as the necessity of a slow roll out of security changes, seem to have originated from beyond Zurfi, possibly from Baghdad instructions and the requirements of the religious establishment. Zurfi, however, does not have the requisite background for this approach and the PRT remains wary of how many of these carefully calibrated reforms will take place. Zurfi has a reputation as a hot-blooded government official and has a widely known hostile relationship with most of the ISCI leadership in Najaf. Zurfi also has tentative ties to the very Sadrists QNajaf. Zurfi also has tentative ties to the very Sadrists who aligned with him to put him in power. This will mean that the new Governor will walk a taught tightrope as he tries to make good on his promises to cooperate with all ends of the political spectrum and maintain security in Najaf.

End Comment.

HILL

