

# IN BITCHY OUTBURST, RISEN CONFIRMS LITHIUM STORY TIMED TO AFGHAN SETBACKS

Frankly, I'm willing to cut James Risen some slack. So much so that when Monday's "Afghanistan is Rich!" story appeared, I didn't post my first instincts: that the story felt more like a planted David Sanger or William Broad story (or, for old time's sake, Judy) than a James Risen story.

But in response to well-deserved skepticism about the story, Risen went on a bit of a rant—complete with bloggers in their pajamas. And while his rant refutes the suggestion that this was entirely planted (Milt Bearden had told him about the mineral finds some time ago), it absolutely confirms one of the concerns raised about the piece: that its timing had everything to do with recent setbacks in Afghanistan and, probably, Petraeus' testimony before Congress.

"Several months ago, Milt started telling me about what they were finding," Risen said. "At the beginning of the year, I said I wanted to do a story on it." At first both Bearden and [Paul Brinkley, the guy at DOD tasked with rebuilding the Afghan economy] resisted, Risen said, but he eventually wore them down. "Milt convinced Brinkley to talk to me," he said, "and Brinkley convinced other Pentagon officials to go on the record. **I think Milt realized that things were going so badly in Afghanistan that people would be willing to talk about this.**" In other words, according to Risen, he wasn't handed the story in a calculated leak. Calls and e-mails to Brinkley and to Eric Clark, a Pentagon public relations contractor who works with him, were not immediately

returned. [my emphasis]

According to Risen's own account, he had been discussing this story since at least the beginning of the year. He never published a story using these sources off the record, nor did he use the material in the public record to point to these riches.

But on the eve of Petraeus' testimony, the people he had been talking to did decide it made a good time to go on the record.

Oh, and Risen? If you read this, I'm half-dressed in prep to go cover the Marriage Equality trial. You see, calling out government spin is just what we bloggers do for breakfast. And even if I were wearing my pajamas, I'm not sure I'd be physically able to "jerk off" in them.