


OUR LATEST RENT-A-THUGGISH-SHEIKH IN IRAQ

 I have little wisdom to add to this Abu Aardvark post, but I wanted to make sure people saw it:

It's kind of lost in the shuffle of the coming battle over the various Iraq reports, but I find myself morbidly fascinated by the photos and reports which have circulated in the Iraqi press about Bush's meeting in Anbar with the controversial head of the Anbar Salvation Council Sattar Abu Risha. The pictures themselves speak volumes: look at Bush's shit-eating grin and Abu Risha's detached contempt, and figure out which is the supplicant in this scenario.

An hour with Bush was really quite a coup for Sattar Abu Risha. The head of the Anbar Salvation Council has a rather unsavory reputation as one of the shadiest figures in the Sunni community, and as recently as June was reportedly on his way out. As a report in Time described him,

Sheikh Sattar, whose tribe is notorious for highway banditry, is also building a personal militia, loyal not to the Iraqi government but only to him. Other tribes "even those who want no truck with terrorists" complain they are being forced to kowtow to him. Those who refuse risk being branded as friends of al-Qaeda and tossed in jail, or worse. In Baghdad, government delight at the Anbar Front's impact on al-Qaeda

istempered by concern that the Marines have unwittingly turned SheikhSattar into a warlord who will turn the province into his personalfiefdom.

In June, Abu Risha's position in the Anbar Salvation Council came under a fairly intense internal challenge.Â As the Washington Post reported at the time,Â

Ali Hatem Ali Suleiman, 35, a leader of the Dulaim confederation, thelargest tribal organization in Anbar, said that the Anbar SalvationCouncil would be dissolved because of growing internal dissatisfactionover its cooperation with U.S. soldiers and the behavior of thecouncil's most prominent member, Abdul Sattar Abu Risha. Suleimancalled Abu Risha a "traitor" who "sells his beliefs, his religion andhis people for money."

That's our guy.Â That's the pillar of America's Sunni strategy, and a key player in Fred Kagan's fantasy life.

The Administration has already played a bait and switch by pointing to growing Sunni opposition to Al Qaeda Iraq in Anbar as proof of the surge's success, rather than real the political progress in Baghdad that surge backers promised. But if that "progress" in Anbar comes with the price tag of these kinds of bedfellows, it even further diminishes their claims.