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Iran's deadly hand in Afghanistan

By James Kirchick

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There can be little doubt that the release by WikiLeaks of more than 90,000 classified government documents about the war in Afghanistan will endanger the lives of Afghan civilians who cooperated with coalition forces against the Taliban. Never mind the response of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen, who said that Julian Assange, the immensely creepy and cold-blooded founder of WikiLeaks, might already have blood on his hands. Take it from the Taliban itself, which says that it will punish those named in the document.

Assange condemns Western governments for manipulating information, but he is far from a disinterested purveyor of facts. In April, I saw him deliver a speech in Oslo in which he explicitly compared the Guantanamo Bay prison camp to Auschwitz. His interest is not in making the world more transparent, but in humiliating the United States. He is a hard-core leftist and a paranoid.

Ironically, however, he has boosted the case for broadening the war on Islamist terror. For in addition to the trove of valuable information he's handed to the Taliban, Assange has also released documents detailing the extensive links between Iran and Al Qaeda. Those who want to take an even harder line against that country's revolutionary Islamist leaders now have more evidence to make their case.

Conventional wisdom has it that Shiites and Sunnis are opposed to working with one another, whether in forming a democratic government in Iraq or cooperating in more

disreputable activities like terrorism. This argument has been invoked to deny that Shiite Iran would work with Sunni extremist groups like Al Qaeda.

The WikiLeaks revelations prove otherwise. One document details a 2005 mission undertaken by Sunni Pakistani militant leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Osama Bin Laden's financial adviser - known only as "Dr. Amin" - to obtain rockets to shoot down coalition planes in Afghanistan. The two departed from Iran, where Hekmatyar had resided for 6 years, to North Korea. That same year, Iran offered thousands of dollars to (Sunni) Taliban for the purpose of murdering Afghan officials. Apparently, whatever theological differences the Iranian mullahs have with Al Qaeda are secondary to their mutual loathing of the U.S.

To wit, a 2006 report from the WikiLeaks files details an Al Qaeda plan to construct car bombs using vehicles and armaments from Iran. A 2007 report found that Al Qaeda, "helped by Iran," bought more than 70 missiles and hid them in the Islamic Republic. As late as 2009, U.S. government officials were filing reports of Taliban fighters using rocket-propelled grenade launchers with the phrase "Made in Iran" embossed in Persian.

The Iranian-Sunni terror link is being treated as something new, but it has existed for years. The 9/11 commission report detailed how Iran provided shelter to Al Qaeda members in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's rout. And Iran has long supported Hamas, a Sunni group, in its war against Israel.

Iran's support for these elements serves a strategic purpose, as it boosts the Shiite regime's stature in its Sunni Arab neighborhood, encouraging Sunnis to look away from internecine Muslim warfare toward their allegedly common enemy: the infidel West.

Assange believes that by leaking information about the frustrated war effort in Afghanistan, he will sap American will. In truth, by revealing the extent of Iranian aid to Sunni radicals, he only confirmed what astute observers have long known.

That is, we've been at war with Iran for years. It is a war declared by Iran, which has been killing our soldiers and allies in various theaters. But it is a war a reluctant America has refused to recognize it is fighting. Perhaps the WikiLeaks deluge will change that complacency.

So here's to Julian Assange for illuminating the age-old observation that the enemy of one's enemy - no matter how ideologically antagonistic - can indeed be one's friend.

Kirchick is a writer at large with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and a contributing editor to The New Republic