

THERE ARE NO CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE CABLE LANDINGS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Yeah right.

A number of commentators have said this leaked Wikileaks cable – listing what facilities internationally were considered “critical infrastructure and key resources” under the Homeland Security National Infrastructure Protection Plan and therefore worthy of additional surveillance and protection – is the most damaging yet to our national security.

Insofar as it gives our enemies a handy-dandy list of what we consider the most important resources to keep the empire running, I agree.

Then again, seeing as how our government(s) target their illegal domestic surveillance based on their definition of NIPP, even while ignoring corporate damage to the same kinds of infrastructure, I think it’s the kind of information citizens ought to have access to, at least in generalized form. We ought to know that if you mobilize against a new pipeline, for example, the government will illegally surveil you.

Furthermore, it says a lot about who we are and how the empire perceives itself. We are, it seems, about our trade (Chinese ports and NAFTA border entries figure prominently), our diseases (a number of drug factories are listed), certain raw materials (like the rare earth China recently throttled to prove a point), and certain defense factories in partner nations.

The vegetarians in the crowd may be intrigued to learn that our government considers foot and mouth disease a critical threat, as the list includes three foot and mouth disease vaccine plants.

Most of all, this list of critical infrastructure reveals what we already knew: the telecommunications network has become as crucial to our empire as the telegram was to the British empire. By my rough count, the list includes 71 cable landing spots around the world (though I think at least one is listed twice), from around 15 going into Japan to the one each going into the Netherland Antilles and Trinidad and Tobago. This list confirms these points where submarine telecommunications cables come on shore to connect the InterToobz and other telecommunication traffic are critical to the viability of our empire.

And oddly, there's not a single cable landing listed for the Middle East (or Africa). And it's not so much that this list doesn't include cable landings in somewhat hostile countries, because it lists 4 in Venezuela. But it lists no cable landings in the Middle East.

I find the absence of any Middle Eastern landings all the more interesting given something that happened in 2008, when four cables went down over the span five days.

The first two cables—just off Alexandria, Egypt—went down on Wednesday. Initially, news reports assumed the two cables had been cut by a ship's anchor, but yesterday Egypt announced that that's not the case: the cables went down in a restricted area, and no ships were present.

No ships were present when two marine cables carrying much of the Middle East's internet traffic were severed, Egypt's Ministry of Communications has said, contrary to earlier speculation about the causes of the cut.

[snip]

The ministry added that the location, 5 miles from the port

of Alexandria, was in a restricted area so ships would not have been allowed there to begin with.

Then, on Friday, a third cable off of Dubai went down. Significantly, this cable doesn't carry India specific traffic. Then, finally, a fourth cable, between Qatar and UAE, went down yesterday. Five days, four cables, and no ships near the first two in Egypt.

Now, the collective effect of these four lost cables at the time – particularly the two cables coming into Egypt – demonstrates why cable landings are critical infrastructure. The outages disrupted India's call center business and left most of the people in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the communication dark for a period. (Here are some thoughts John Robb had at the time on the roll that cable disruptions might play in asymmetric warfare.)

Yet this list of critical infrastructure doesn't even list the Egyptian cable landing that proved so disruptive just one year before this list was written.

It seems there are at least two possibilities to explain the absence of any Middle Eastern cable landings on this list. First, it's possible there's a second list somewhere – classified Top Secret – that lists the cable landings that provide telecommunication service to the most volatile area on earth. It's possible, too, that the US chooses not to consider these cable landings critical, relying instead on the cable coming through Asia. Or perhaps the public cable landings – the ones people know about – aren't the ones that the US empire relies on to connect with the Middle East.

I'm sure there are other possibilities.

But what seems certain is that there are cable landings carrying trade into (and allowing us to

eavesdrop in) the Middle East that are critical to our empire; we're just not privy to which those are.