

DJIBOUTI'S CABLE NEWS

Remember back in 2008, when a mysterious cluster of intercontinental cables were cut, knocking parts of the Middle East and South Asia (notably Egypt and Pakistan) off telecom networks?

Well, we've got another cluster of cut cables again, this time off of Djibouti, where one of our currently most critical bases is (we operate into Yemen and Somalia from there).

Undersea data cables linking East Africa to the Middle East and Europe were severed in two separate shipping accidents this month, causing telecommunications outages in at least nine countries and affecting millions of Internet and phone users, telecom executives and government officials said.

A ship dragging its anchor off the coast of the Kenyan port city of Mombasa severed a crucial Internet and phone link for the region Saturday, crippling electronic communications from Zimbabwe to Djibouti, according to a public-private consortium that owns the undersea cable.

The Indian Ocean fiber-optic cable, known as The East African Marine Systems, or Teams, is owned by a group of telecom companies and the Kenyan government. It was the fourth cable to be severed in the region since Feb. 17.

The Teams cable had been rerouting data from three other cables severed 10 days ago in the Red Sea between Djibouti and the Middle East. Together, the four fiber-optic cables channel thousands of gigabytes of information per second and form the backbone of East Africa's telecom infrastructure.

There are, undoubtedly, a number of interesting conversations that would be transiting those telecom lines, not least those between AQAP and al-Shabaab. Not to mention the conversations within East Africa.

But those conversations won't be traveling by most easily accessible telecommunication channels, at least not until those cables are restored.

And while we're discussing Internet cables, note that these Djibouti cables, like those off of Egypt that were taken out in 2008, do not appear on State's cable-classified just Secret-of critical infrastructure around the globe.