

ON TOOBZ AND GASES

Danger Room answers—sort of—one of the big questions I had after reading NYT's report (relying in part on Israeli sources) that Syria appeared to be preparing to use its chemical weapons: what is the connection between Syria's two and a half day Internet outage last week and today's barrage of leaks reporting on the CW?

On Thursday, Syria abruptly became disconnected from the internet, likely after the regime disabled the four cables that provide Syria with connectivity. The rebels use the internet not only to document regime atrocities but to disseminate training tactics and to spread their propaganda. Yet the regime also relies on the internet: it's tried to hijack rebel hardware by spreading spyware in the form of fake security software. As Danger Room predicted last week, the outage ended quickly, as online monitor Renesys confirmed a "largely complete restoration of the Syrian Internet" by Saturday.

The U.S. official doesn't believe the internet blackout was related to the combination of the chemical weapon binaries. And at the Pentagon, Defense Department spokesman Little said the online outage didn't make a difference for the U.S. understanding of Assad's dangerous weapons. "The U.S. government has good visibility into the chemical weapons program and we continue to monitor it," Little said.

These paragraphs make it clear that:

1. The US and Israel are not relying on the Toobz to spy on the Assad regime

2. A US source claims to believe there is no tie between alleged Syrian moves, taken on Wednesday, to mix sarin precursors and the complete shutdown on Thursday of Syria's Internet

Danger Room's sources aren't even asserting that both events—the mixing of the CW on Wednesday and the Intertoobz blackout on Thursday—are both signs of Bashar al-Assad's panic.

Which would sort of be the default unless intelligence sources had reason to know that the Intertoobz blackout had nothing to do with the CW mixing.

We've long traced interesting Intertoobz blackouts caused by cut cables on this blog: the recent blackout in Djibouti. to a cable in the Bay Area, to a number of cut cables in the Middle East back in 2008.

It appears to be an increasingly common tactic, one difficult to attribute to a specific actor.

But if one of those actors comes out a few days after an outage and says they have no reason to find that outage as suspicious as the mixing of CW, maybe it's not so hard to attribute after all.

Update: See Moon of Alabama's description of why Assad is not mixing chemicals. Which makes it all the more interesting that US sources claim to be so certain the outage had not ties to their claimed sarin mixing.