"PEOPLE IN THE GULF" TALKING ON SKYPE

The NatSec twittersphere is abuzz about the fact that the CIA indirectly warned Hezbollah that some al Qaeda operatives were preparing an attack on a location in southern Lebanon.

I'm actually less interested that we felt the need to warn a political entity that we consider a terrorist organization than the other details of the story — and that it **is** a story Lebanese sources felt free to share with the press.

For example, the report says we intercepted calls between the al Qaeda operatives and "people in the Gulf."

> "They had transcripts of calls made from known al Qaida people in Lebanon to people in the Gulf that included detailed information about the attacks, including the amounts of explosives that had been smuggled into Lebanon," said one Lebanese intelligence official who is barred from speaking openly to reporters.

McClatchy suggests these al Qaeda figures were calling other al Qaeda figures in this unnamed Gulf country. But why should we assume that? Qatar has been funding al Qaeda linked militants in Syria. Is it possible this story is public because the US wants it known that we're so tired of Qatar's support for terrorists we'll even tip Hezbollah to plans Qatari backed terrorists have made?

Indeed, a comment from a Hezbollah member quoted in the story seems to suggest this warning (and, I would suggest, the publicity surrounding it) is an effort to put the genie we've created back in the bottle.

> The Hezbollah commander said he thought the warning was more pragmatic.

> "The Americans are starting to realize how bad their friends in Syria are, so they're trying to get out of this mistake," he said. "They also think that if a bomb goes off in Dahiya, we will blame America and target Americans in Lebanon. That will never happen, but they're scared of this monster they created."'

That monster was created with the funding of one of our close allies.

I'm also intrigued by the suggestion that the US managed to collect these calls whereas the Lebanese could not because it was VOIP.

> A security contractor familiar with the capabilities of the Lebanese intelligence services said it was likely that the targets had used voice-over-Internet software that the Lebanese services lack the equipment and expertise to decrypt but that poses few problems for the Americans.
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> "Lebanon lacks the expertise and the technology for that," said the contractor, who asked not to be further identified because of the sensitivity of his work. "But once the call left Lebanon for the Gulf, the NSA would have automatically been tracking it."

We've just learned the extent to which Microsoft has helped the government access Skype. And the government claims such disclosures have led terrorists to stop using Skype.

Were these terrorists and their friends in the gulf?

Update: Via Twitter, McClatchy reporter and Middle East expert Jonathan Landay says I'm reading way too much into this, and that there is a backstory he cannot share.

So take these musings as off-base ones.