

CIA'S "VENGEFUL LIBRARIANS" V. DIFI: OPEN SOURCE GRUDGE MATCH

The AP's story on the CIA's social media monitoring project is an important article, if unsurprising.

At the agency's Open Source Center, a team known affectionately as the "vengeful librarians" also pores over Facebook, newspapers, TV news channels, local radio stations, Internet chat rooms – anything overseas that anyone can access and contribute to openly.

From Arabic to Mandarin Chinese, from an angry tweet to a thoughtful blog, the analysts gather the information, often in native tongue. They cross-reference it with the local newspaper or a clandestinely intercepted phone conversation.

But I'm struck by one thing. The Center's head, Doug Naquin, seems to directly contradict DiFi's assertions, made in February, when she complained that the CIA had ignored open-source intelligence on Arab Spring protests. Here's DiFi:

Feinstein set a skeptical tone at the opening of the hearing, saying Obama and other policymakers deserved timely intelligence on major world events. Referring to Egypt, she said, "I have doubts whether the intelligence community lived up to its obligations in this area."

After the hearing, Feinstein said she was particularly concerned that the CIA and other agencies had ignored open-

source intelligence on the protests, a reference to posts on Facebook and other publicly accessible Web sites used by organizers of the protests against the Mubarak government.

Speaking more broadly about intelligence on turmoil in the Middle East, Feinstein said, "I've looked at some intelligence in this area." She described it as "lacking . . . on collection."

And here's Naquin, claiming they did too predict Egypt's uprising.

Yes, they saw the uprising in Egypt coming; they just didn't know exactly when revolution might hit, said the center's director, Doug Naquin.

The center already had "predicted that social media in places like Egypt could be a game-changer and a threat to the regime," he said in a recent interview with The Associated Press at the center.

Given what I found in this post—that our government spent time counting Mohammed el Baradei's FaceBook followers while dismissing the April 6 movement people who ended up leading the uprising—I actually think DiFi may be right. Indeed, the AP article focuses on other moments—Thai riots in spring 2010 and the aftermath of the bin Laden killing—to demonstrate the value of the center.

I'm really glad CIA boasted of their analysis of the Toobz. But I'm not entirely convinced they're any good at what they're doing.