NSA'S PLANS TO EXCUSE THEIR HACKER FUCK-UPS: BLAME ISRAEL

Wired has a very fascinating interview with Edward Snowden. You should go read the whole thing, among other things, for the swell picture of Snowden posing with Michael Hayden at some black tie event in 2011.

But I wanted to point to this incident.

> One day an intelligence officer told him that TAO—a division of NSA hackers—had attempted in 2012 to remotely install an exploit in one of the core routers at a major Internet service provider in Syria, which was in the midst of a prolonged civil war. This would have given the NSA access to email and other Internet traffic from much of the country. But something went wrong, and the router was bricked instead—rendered totally inoperable. The failure of this router caused Syria to suddenly lose all connection to the Internet—although the public didn't know that the US government was responsible. (This is the first time the claim has been revealed.)
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> Inside the TAO operations center, the panicked government hackers had what Snowden calls an "oh shit" moment. They raced to remotely repair the router, desperate to cover their tracks and prevent the Syrians from discovering the sophisticated infiltration software used to access the network. But because the router was bricked, they were powerless to fix the problem.
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> Fortunately for the NSA, the Syrians were apparently more focused on restoring the nation's Internet than on tracking down the cause of the outage. Back at TAO's operations center, the

> tension was broken with a joke that
> contained more than a little truth: "If
> we get caught, we can always point the
> finger at Israel."

I assume — but am not certain — this was the outage in question. If so, the response is instructive. At least 3 US-based Internet security firms reported that Syria had brought down the Internet. Were they making stuff up, unable to determine what really happened, or just repeating something US officials told them?

I'm just as interested that — just 6 months after David Sanger's reporting on how the Israelis let StuxNet escape…

> An error in the code, they said, had led
> it to spread to an engineer's computer
> when it was hooked up to the
> centrifuges. When the engineer left
> Natanz and connected the computer to the
> Internet, the American- and Israeli-made
> bug failed to recognize that its
> environment had changed. It began
> replicating itself all around the world.
> Suddenly, the code was exposed, though
> its intent would not be clear, at least
> to ordinary computer users.
>
> "We think there was a modification done
> by the Israelis," one of the briefers
> told the president, "and we don't know
> if we were part of that activity."

NSA's hackers joked they might hide a major fuck-up by blaming Israel.

I'm sure that's all just a coinkydink, though.