



# The Downey Patriot

## Letter to the Editor: Undersea cables

Staff Report November 18, 2015

Dear Editor:

Even though it seems we live in a wireless world we are still most certainly wired. Perhaps more counterintuitively our wired and interconnected world depends more on the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard than NASA. Most people would probably assume that communication, including data sent over the internet, gets bounced up to a satellite and then beamed down to the recipient. However, the vast majority of information travels in the opposite direction-down to the ocean floor.

The first undersea telegraph cables were laid across the English Channel in 1850. Technology has advanced at an incredible speed since then but the basic structure of communicating long distances has changed the same. Today about 95 percent of intercontinental communication including almost everything done on computers are sent through 300 thin fiber-optic cables traversing a combined 600,000 miles. With more and more business being done over the internet the global economy is closely dependent on these 1-2 inch thick strands of plastic.

This past week news agencies reported that Russian submarines were cruising along the routes that the undersea cables take. While the submarines were not openly aggressive, the move is still very concerning because the Russian Navy seems to have a clear message in mind- that they are able to cut off the flow of data around the world if they chose. An event like this would cause economic chaos. Consider that in 2006 nine cables snapped near Taiwan when an undersea earthquake occurred. During the 49 days it took for 11 ships to repair the cables communications, trade, markets, and banking were disrupted in China, Japan, The Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Now imagine if a country or terrorist organization tried to coordinate an attack on multiple cable lines. The economy would be in turmoil and during the weeks, months, or even years of repair work the economic damage would compound.

Our undersea cables must be protected. The potential damage from an attack is too great not just to ourselves but to every country. With undersea vehicle technology becoming more advanced, remote underwater vehicles will likely become more accessible to militaries and potentially terrorist groups bringing these data cables within range to attack.

The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard are the obvious organizations to take the lead in securing the undersea nodes of communication. The Navy has the platforms and deep sea capabilities to counter underwater threats and the Coast Guard has law enforcement authority. However, they will both need funding in order to protect our data cables effectively. Sensors on the ocean floor to detect and monitor threats and the vehicles to install them are investments that will cost far less than a global economic crisis.

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