

MICHELLE BACHMANN'S NUCLEAR THEFT

When Michelle Bachmann announced at the GOP National Security debate last night that there were 15 Pakistani nuclear sites that might be accessible to terrorists...

BLITZER: All right. You're a member of the Intelligence Committee. Do you think, as Governor Perry has said, that Pakistan should no longer receive U.S. aid because they've shown they're not a good friend, ally of the United States?

BACHMANN: Pakistan has been the epicenter of dealing with terrorism. They are, as Governor Huntsman said, there are al-Qaeda training grounds there. There's also the Haqqani network that can be trained there as well. And they also are one of the most violent, unstable nations that there is. We have to recognize that 15 of the sites, nuclear sites are available or are potentially penetrable by jihadists. Six attempts have already been made on nuclear sites. This is more than an existential threat. We have to take this very seriously. [my emphasis]

... I thought that she might make a really good source for journalists. After all, she is a member of the House Intelligence Committee, so she would be in briefings on the subject. And she often doesn't seem able to control what she says, so it's possible she would just leak information like this without realizing she had leaked.

That said, unless she was the source for the Jeffrey Goldberg/Marc Ambinder blockbuster article on "The Ally from Hell," she wasn't the first person to leak such information. Indeed, Bachman's comment parroted the language Goldberg and Ambinder used exactly.

Pakistan is an unstable and violent country located at the epicenter of global jihadism,

[snip]

At least six facilities widely believed to be associated with Pakistan's nuclear program have already been targeted by militants. In November 2007, a suicide bomber attacked a bus carrying workers to the Sargodha air base, which is believed to house nuclear weapons; the following month, a school bus was attacked outside Kamra air base, which may also serve as a nuclear storage site; in August 2008, Pakistani Taliban suicide bombers attacked what experts believe to be the country's main nuclear-weapons-assembly depot in Wah cantonment. If jihadists are looking to raid a nuclear facility, they have a wide selection of targets: Pakistan is very secretive about the locations of its nuclear facilities, but satellite imagery and other sources suggest that there are at least 15 sites across Pakistan at which jihadists could find warheads or other nuclear materials. [my emphasis]

So the most logical explanation is that her staffers prepped her for the debate using language taken directly from the Goldberg/Ambinder article, whether or not she had been briefed on the threat to Pakistan's nukes originally.

All that said, such an obvious explanation begs the question of why Ambinder's colleague, Yochi Dreazen, had this to say in a fact check of Bachmann's comment.

During the CNN debate, Bachmann said that 15 Pakistani nuclear sites were vulnerable to jihadist attacks, and that six of the sites had previously come

under some form of Islamist attack. U.S. intelligence and military officials believe that Pakistan has 15 nuclear sites, but no U.S. official has publicly said that all of the sites were vulnerable to militant attack or confirmed that any of them had previously come under any form of jihadist attack.

Sure, no US official has publicly said that all the sites are vulnerable or that 6 had come under attack. But the National Journal (in partnership with the Atlantic) has said it, presumably based on the anonymous leaking of at least one US official. And why suggest Bachmann's statement was inaccurate when NJ itself had first published the information?

Taking the NJ's comments together, we ought to assume Bachmann's comment was, generally, accurate, but the NJ doesn't want to take responsibility for having published what Bachmann has now magnified by using it as a debate zinger.