India Nuclear Deal: Dumb and Dumber

By Daryl G. Kimball One of the chief proponents of the disastrous 2008 civil nuclear trade exemption for India, Ashley Tellis, is apparently a bit sour about this week's announcement from the Indian government that it will pursue the purchase of the European Eurofighter and French Rafale aircraft rather than U.S. made F-18 (Boeing) or F-16 (Lockheed Martin) as part of its drive to build up its conventional military capabilities. The Hindu reports today:

Questioning whether these aircraft represented the best value for the IAF and the best investments for India overall, Mr. Tellis said to The Hindu that given that India had settled for an aircraft over a strategic relationship "there is no reason why the administration should bend backwards to accommodate India". Mr. Tellis, formerly a senior advisor to the Ambassador at the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, a staff member of the National Security Council and Special Assistant to the President, also had critical words for the manner in which the decision was made and announced. He said that it only made things worse given that "the GOI knew full well the importance the administration attached to this sale... [and] a quiet intimation of the coming decision would have helped."

See http://bit.ly/mGIxf9 for the full story. Dumb and dumber This just makes the 2005-2008 George W. Bush administration-led campaign to exempt India from national and international nuclear standards look like an even bigger geopolitical blunder than before. Not only has it damaged the global nonproliferation regime, but it has not resulted in the huge investments in U.S. defense companies that proponents hoped (whether that is a worthwhile goal is a separate question). Nor has the Indian civil nuclear cooperation initiative opened up India's treasury for U.S. nuclear vendors, largely due to disputes over liability protection for nuclear suppliers in the case of nuclear accidents. Instead government-backed Russian and French firms have moved in aggressively. India's government, meanwhile, is facing increasingly hostile opposition from its own citizens to new nuclear reactor projects in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The only silver lining I can see is that there is no longer any plausible reason why the U.S. should expend precious political capital and further damage the nonproliferation cause by working to convince the NSG to allow India to join its ranks as a full-blown member. For more on that problem, see my earlier post, "Obama's message to India: proliferation violations don't have consequences."