US Arms Sales to India

BY DINSHAW MISTRY

Arms sales are a major component of America’s strategic partnership with India. How extensive are these sales? Answers to this fundamental question vary widely. Illustrating this, in February, the Jane’s defense analysis group noted that India was the leading purchaser of American weapons during the previous year; the media reported this under the headline “India becomes biggest foreign buyer of US weapons.” In contrast, in March, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) noted that Russia accounted for 75 percent and the US supplied just 7 percent of India’s military imports. Which perspective is more accurate? Neither, because both look at arms deliveries rather than arms orders, and they only cover select years. When analyzing India’s arms orders over a more appropriate period, from 2001 to 2013, a more nuanced picture emerges: while India is not usually among the top five markets for the US defense industry, it is increasingly ordering greater quantities of American military hardware, and the United States is India’s third-largest source of arms.

New Delhi’s defense procurements from the United States are worth a substantial $15 billion. In comparison, US defense sales to its Asia-Pacific allies Australia, Japan, and South Korea, and to Middle East partners Israel, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), were $20 billion to $30 billion, while those to Saudi Arabia were over $60 billion.

Second, the United States is India’s third-largest defense supplier, accounting for about one-fifth of its military imports. India’s arms orders from the United States, valued at $15 billion, were somewhat less than those from Russia—nearly $30 billion—and France—$20 billion—but greater than those from Israel—$10 billion—and the United Kingdom—$4 billion.

Third, contrary to prevailing perspectives about a downturn in US-India relations under the Obama administration, US defense sales to India have increased during this time. From 2001 to 2004, New Delhi’s arms imports from the United States were $400 million. India then purchased 12 Raytheon Firefinder artillery radars valued at $200 million, 20 General Electric GE-F404 engines for India’s light combat aircraft at a cost of $100 million, and ten GE-LM-2500 gas turbines for Indian naval ships costing $60 million.

Over the next four years, 2005 to 2008, New Delhi’s military procurements from US firms, some of which are pending finalization, were worth $11 billion. They included several dedicated offensive weapons: 500 CBU-97 guided bombs for Jaguar aircraft valued at $250 million, 40 Harpoon anti-ship missiles from Boeing for $370 million, 145 howitzers from a US subsidiary of British Aerospace costing $885 million, and 22 Boeing Apache attack helicopters valued at $1.4 billion. They also included 100 GE-F414 aircraft engines worth $800 million, 270 Honeywell...
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