

## Expect more pragmatic Indian foreign policy: Ex-envoy

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India's foreign policy outlook will be focused increasingly on its broader economic interests as it outgrows its neighbourhood.

Such a strategy, which is part of its efforts to project itself as an emerging global power, will translate into greater pragmatism in its ties with Pakistan, the United States and China, and a review of its ties with Russia.

These were the views of **Mr David Malone**, President of Canada's International Development Research Centre and the nation's high commissioner to India from 2006 to the middle of last year.

A Lee Kuan Yew Exchange Fellow in 2004, Mr Malone is currently working on a book on India's foreign policy. He spoke on the subject at the **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies** in Singapore last Friday.

India's foreign policy, he noted, was characterised by idealism in the years after independence in 1947, and a sense of realism in the 1970s. Since the country began opening up its economy in the 1990s, however, its foreign policy has undergone a rapid change.

There is a realisation that India's future has for too long been tied to the future of its neighbours, and now, New Delhi wants to outgrow its neighbours.

Consequently, said Mr Malone, despite the Mumbai attacks, India is 'much less inclined to blame Pakistan for everything that goes in India than it used to be'.

The former high commissioner to India also believes that a flare-up between the nuclear neighbours is unlikely. 'Pakistanis I know believe that they need to resolve their own problems,' he explained. 'There is a recognition that their country is undermined by a number of factors that are strictly domestic rather than foreign.'

At the same time, Mr Malone observed, India's economic ties with China are changing rapidly, even though both sides complain about each other's 'shoddy' goods.

Beijing, he pointed out, did not block India's nuclear deal with the US when it was to be ratified by the International Atomic Energy Agency. 'A very developed economic relationship is a bulwark against conflict over time,' he said.

'India and China are good news rather than bad news, and both are working hard to maintain that relationship.'

Likewise, New Delhi and Washington are also growing closer.

Since the US realised India's huge market potential about 10 years ago, Washington has wanted to be part of the action.

But does it mean that India will be an ally of the US?

Mr Malone felt otherwise. 'Many opportunities open up, but India does not want to be part of a contain-China strategy.'

On the other hand, he noted, there has been no significant improvement in economic ties between New Delhi and Moscow.

'As New Delhi manages its ascent to a great power status, it is looking to cement the important economic ties,' he said.

'The Indian government has been driven largely by an economic agenda since the early 1990s.

'It means that relationships with countries it trades with are likely to be more important than countries with which it doesn't trade with a great deal.'