

PAKISTAN AT THE 81ST UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY: REAFFIRMING DIPLOMACY, PEACE AND A PROGRESSIVE GLOBAL ROLE

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“Pakistan has made its choice. We have chosen dialogue over confrontation. We have chosen cooperation over coercion. We have chosen peace over war.”

— Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Address to the 81st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s address to the 81st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) presents Pakistan’s foreign-policy outlook through the interconnected themes of peace, dialogue, conflict prevention, multilateralism, development, climate justice and reform of the international system. The speech seeks to position Pakistan not merely as a state affected by regional and global conflicts, but increasingly as a country willing to contribute to their peaceful resolution.

The overarching message is captured in the Prime Minister’s assertion that

“War is a choice, but peace is also a far better choice,” followed by the declaration:

“Pakistan has made its choice. We have chosen dialogue over confrontation. We have chosen cooperation over coercion. We have chosen peace over war.”

This emphasis is particularly significant when considered alongside Pakistan’s recent diplomatic activity. During 2025–26, Islamabad has sought to employ dialogue and facilitation in several difficult regional situations, including the Pakistan-India crisis, the U.S.-Iran conflict, the Gaza question, and wider Middle Eastern tensions. Pakistan’s sponsorship of UN Security Council Resolution 2788 on

peaceful settlement of disputes during its July 2025 Council presidency further provides an institutional dimension to this approach.

Peace and Diplomacy

The most prominent feature of the Prime Minister's address is the elevation of diplomacy from a preferred instrument of foreign policy to a central principle of international security. Drawing on the vision of Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Prime Minister links Pakistan's contemporary foreign policy to the UN Charter and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

He recalled Jinnah's declaration that Pakistan would

"Stand by the United Nations Charter and will gladly make our full contribution to the peace and prosperity of the world."

The Prime Minister later linked this principle to Pakistan's role during its UNSC presidency, highlighting the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2788 on strengthening mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes. The resolution reaffirmed the importance of dialogue, diplomatic engagement, cooperation, and peaceful means for resolving international disputes.

This shows continuity between Pakistan's position at the UNGA and its multilateral diplomacy. The formulation—

"Yet amid the roar of missiles, drones and guns, the voice for diplomacy must echo even louder and stronger."

—captures the speech's broader strategic argument: military deterrence may prevent immediate threats, but sustainable regional stability ultimately requires political engagement.

Pakistan's Emerging Role in the Middle East

A particularly significant component of the address was the Prime Minister's discussion of Pakistan's role in efforts to reduce tensions between the U.S. and Iran, bring them together in Islamabad, and subsequently facilitate the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding.

In June 2026, representatives of the U.S. and Iran, with Pakistan and Qatar acting as mediators, held talks on implementing the Islamabad MoU.¹ This initiative's significance extends beyond the

¹ "Transcript of the Press Briefing by the Spokesperson," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, April 16, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/transcript-of-the-press-briefing-by-the-spokesperson-on-thursday-16th-april-2026>

immediate crisis. It illustrates Pakistan's attempt to use its relationships with regional and extra-regional actors to bridge the gap between competing parties.

The Prime Minister's UNGA remarks therefore provide an international political narrative for the diplomatic role Pakistan has pursued throughout 2026.

Three aspects are noteworthy:

1. *Facilitation rather than confrontation*: Pakistan seeks to create channels of communication between adversarial states rather than align itself exclusively with one side.
2. *Regional ownership*: Islamabad's approach increasingly involves working with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and other regional actors rather than treating conflict resolution solely as a major-power enterprise.
3. *Institutional diplomacy*: The Islamabad MoU provides a framework through which dialogue can potentially continue even when political circumstances deteriorate.

South Asia

The speech also addressed the 2025 Pakistan-India crisis and Pakistan's subsequent emphasis on preventing another escalation between two nuclear-armed states. The Prime Minister characterized Pakistan's military response as an exercise of its right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter and subsequently stressed the importance of ensuring that South Asia does not again approach the brink of a wider conflict.

The speech presented an important conceptual distinction between deterrence and diplomacy. Pakistan's stated position is that maintaining the capacity for self-defense does not preclude pursuing dialogue. Rather, the two can operate simultaneously as components of crisis management.

The Prime Minister's statement that South Asia must never again reach the "*precipice*" of all-out war is consequently one of the speech's more forward-looking elements.

Kashmir and Regional Stability

The Prime Minister linked sustainable peace in South Asia to resolving the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Pakistan reaffirms its longstanding position that any peaceful settlement must align with relevant UN resolutions and reflect the aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

The speech also linked regional stability with the Indus Waters Treaty, arguing that water should not become an instrument of confrontation:

“Water must never be weaponized. Rivers should nourish nations, not divide them.”

From a policy perspective, the water dimension broadens the traditional security discussion. It introduces water security, climate vulnerability, and transboundary resource management into India's strategic relationship with Pakistan.

Palestine and the International Responsibility

The Palestinian question occupied another major portion of the address. The Prime Minister framed Gaza primarily through the humanitarian consequences of prolonged conflict, particularly for children and civilians.

His question—

“Does not a child born in Gaza deserve the same life and the same future and the same dream as a child anywhere else in the world?”

—shifts the discussion from geopolitical competition towards universal human rights.

Importantly, Pakistan has also sought to participate in diplomatic mechanisms related to Gaza. In January 2026, Pakistan announced its decision to join the Board of Peace in support of the Gaza Peace Plan, explicitly linking its participation with the objectives of a permanent ceasefire, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and Palestinian self-determination.²

More recently, Pakistan joined other Arab and Islamic countries in diplomatic efforts supporting the implementation of the Gaza peace framework and a political pathway towards Palestinian statehood.³ Thus, the UNGA speech should be read not only as an expression of solidarity with Palestine but also as part of Pakistan's effort to combine principled advocacy with participation in emerging diplomatic mechanisms.

² Pakistan Accepts Invitation for Joining the Board of Peace (BoP) with a View to Achieving Lasting Peace in Gaza,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, January 21, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/pakistan-accepts-invitation-for-joining-the-board-of-peace-bop-with-the-view-to-achieving-lasting-peace-in-gaza>

³ “Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and the United Arab Emirates,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, September 22, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-by-the-foreign-ministers-of-pakistan-egypt-indonesia-jordan-qatar-saudi-arabia-turkiye-and-the-united-arab-emirates-2>

Pakistan's Expanding Strategic Partnerships

The speech discusses the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye as another manifestation of Pakistan's commitment to regional security. The Prime Minister emphasized that the arrangement is not directed against any other state and described it as a commitment to defense, stability, and peace.

The emphasis on security and regional stability was reflected in the Strategic Political and Defense Committee's meeting in Istanbul on 31 August 2026, where the three countries agreed to further institutionalize cooperation through a dedicated secretariat and cooperation in defense technology and industry, and reaffirmed support for de-escalation and peaceful resolution of crises.

This adds an important dimension to the Prime Minister's argument: Pakistan's conception of peace increasingly incorporates both diplomacy and credible collective security arrangements. The speech presents deterrence, strategic partnerships and diplomacy as complementary instruments for preventing conflict and promoting regional stability.

Counterterrorism and Regional Security

The Prime Minister also highlighted Pakistan's long-standing contribution to international counterterrorism efforts and its sacrifices in confronting terrorism. He noted that Pakistan has fought terrorism in its cities, mountains, and along its borders and emphasized the human and economic costs borne by the country.

Afghanistan and the threat posed by militant groups operating from Afghan territory are subsequently identified as major security concerns. Pakistan calls for verifiable action to prevent Afghan territory from being used against Pakistan or other states while simultaneously stressing the rights of the Afghan population, particularly women and girls.

This is significant because the speech combines security concerns with a humanitarian dimension. Pakistan has maintained that Islamabad favors dialogue with Afghanistan while seeking assurances that Afghan territory will not be used for terrorism against Pakistan. The speech consequently frames counterterrorism as part of collective international security rather than solely a bilateral Pakistan-Afghanistan issue.

Pakistan's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping

The Prime Minister's reference to Pakistani peacekeepers reinforces one of the strongest established elements of Pakistan's contribution to the UN system. He noted that Pakistani men and women have served under the UN flag in protecting civilians and assisting societies emerging from conflict.

Pakistan has long been one of the UN's major contributors of military and police personnel to peacekeeping operations. The UN's current profile records Pakistan's participation across multiple peacekeeping missions. This contribution supports the speech's argument that Pakistan is both a provider and a recipient of international security. It also strengthens Islamabad's case for a more representative multilateral system in which developing countries have a greater role in international decision-making.

Development as a Pillar of International Security

The Prime Minister identified economic revival, fiscal discipline, modernization of agriculture and industry, mineral development, digitization, artificial intelligence and IT skills as components of Pakistan's national transformation.

He subsequently made the broader argument:

“Development must receive the same urgency as security.”

This is an important Global South perspective. Countries facing conflict, debt pressures, climate vulnerability and developmental deficits often experience these issues simultaneously rather than separately.

The Prime Minister's emphasis on CPEC, Gulf partnerships and Central Asian connectivity therefore situates Pakistan's foreign policy within a geo-economic framework. Peace is presented not simply as an absence of conflict, but as an enabling condition for investment, connectivity, trade and human development.

Climate Justice

Climate change constitutes another major dimension of the address. The Prime Minister highlights the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing countries, particularly Pakistan. He notes Pakistan's relatively small contribution to global emissions while emphasizing its repeated exposure to climate-related disasters. The demand for climate finance, loss-and-damage funding, and adaptation support is therefore framed as an issue of climate justice as well as development finance.

This also complements the speech's wider conceptualization of security. Climate change, water insecurity, food insecurity, economic vulnerability and conflict are increasingly interconnected. Pakistan's argument consequently seeks to move the international discussion beyond traditional military security towards a broader understanding of human and developmental security.

Reforming Multilateralism

The final section of the speech returns to the theme of restoring confidence in international institutions.

The Prime Minister argued that trust cannot be rebuilt through rhetoric alone:

“Trust cannot be restored by simple words alone. It must be earned through action, through behavior.”

This provides perhaps the most useful conceptual framework for understanding the address as a whole. Pakistan argues that international institutions regain legitimacy when states translate commitments into concrete action—whether on conflict prevention, climate finance, development, humanitarian protection, or peaceful dispute settlement.

The Prime Minister subsequently calls for a Security Council that is *“more representative, democratic and accountable,”* concluding with the motto:

“Reforms for all, privilege for none.”

The speech can be understood around five interconnected propositions:

1. Pakistan presents dialogue not as a passive alternative to military confrontation but as an active instrument of conflict prevention and crisis management.
2. The discussion of South Asia and the Makkah Agreement suggests that Pakistan views credible security arrangements as potentially complementary to diplomatic engagement when their stated purpose is prevention rather than escalation.
3. The Islamabad process involving the United States and Iran, participation in Gaza-related diplomacy, and regional consultation demonstrate an aspiration to move from being primarily a stakeholder in regional crises to also being a facilitator of dialogue.
4. The speech's emphasis on economic reform, connectivity, climate finance, digital transformation, and development financing reflects a broader understanding of security in which economic resilience is itself a component of national and international stability.

5. The emphasis on peaceful dispute settlement, UN reform, Security Council representativeness, and climate justice reflects Pakistan's broader Global South perspective: international institutions can remain relevant only if they apply their principles consistently and make their decision-making structures more representative.

Conclusion

The most significant aspect of the Prime Minister's address was its efforts to connect the language of peace with a broader conception of Pakistan's foreign policy. The closing passage captures this aspiration:

"We will restore trust when rivers become lifelines of cooperation, not fault lines of conflict."

The address marked an evolving conception of Pakistan's international role as a country seeking to combine national security with diplomacy, strategic partnerships with regional stability, and economic development with peacebuilding. The practical test of this approach will lie in sustaining diplomatic engagement beyond individual crises and translating temporary de-escalation into durable political settlements.