

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PRIME MINISTER SHEHBAZ SHARIF'S ADDRESS TO THE 79TH UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

"We must act now..."

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif



Introduction

"We stand by the United Nations Charter", affirmed the Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, as he addressed the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). During the 21-minute address, the Prime Minister articulated Pakistan's position on a range of issues including the ongoing conflicts around the world, global challenges, domestic reforms, and climate change. He reaffirmed Pakistan's stance on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute and the genocide and humanitarian nightmare unfolding in Gaza. Moreover, he reiterated Pakistan's commitment to playing a proactive role in the promotion and upholding of global peace and stability and stressed UN's centrality in multilateralism and maintenance of international peace and security. This Issue Brief summarizes Pakistan's position on key areas of focus in the Prime Minister's address.

Palestine:

The world is increasingly becoming jaded by geopolitical tensions and burning conflicts. In his speech, the Prime Minister expressed deep concern over multiple global conflicts, the far-reaching consequences of which are enflaming the world. He highlighted the atrocities being carried out by Israel in Palestine with impunity – describing the situation as a "genocidal war" and a "tragedy that shakes the conscience of humanity." He questioned the silence and indifference towards the conflict,

calling it a “systemic slaughter” of the Palestinians. While he stressed the importance of durable peace through a two-state solution, he also called out the failure of the UN in implementing the resolutions, which has led to an emboldened Israel.

Geopolitical Tensions:

The Prime Minister underscored multiple other ongoing conflicts across continents. He cautioned the world about the dire consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict that is moving the world towards a new Cold War. The UN must play its role in defusing the conflict in Ukraine through peaceful negotiations. Pakistan and Africa share a bond of friendship and cooperation. The conflicts across Africa are not less destructive in igniting geopolitical tensions. Pakistan will continue to help Africa in its fight against terrorism, and resolution of conflicts in the continent.

The Question of Kashmir:

For a century, Kashmiris have struggled for their freedom and right to self-determination. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called out India for using its troops to terrorize the people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir who have been living under the dark shadow of Indian occupation for decades, more so since August 2019. He forewarned the UNGA of India's intention to a “Final Solution” approach aimed at erasing the identity of the Kashmiris and their land. He apprised the UNGA of the systemic terrorism that India is carrying out in occupied Kashmir through draconian measures, extrajudicial killings, curfews, as well as abductions of Kashmiris. Along with human rights violations, India is seizing Kashmiri land through a “classic settle-colonial project,” settling outsiders into Jammu and Kashmir. This is aimed at bringing significant demographic change by making Muslims a minority in their own land.

Pakistan-India Relations:

The hegemonic ambitions of India are not limited to occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The Prime Minister exposed India's military expansionist mindset, its war doctrines, and its inclination for a “limited war under the nuclear overhang.” India's military expansion, primarily deployed against Pakistan, further exposes its unwillingness towards durable peace. It has time and again threatened Pakistan with a surprise attack and attack across the Line of Control. The Prime Minister also made it abundantly clear at the UNGA of Pakistan's capability to respond to any Indian aggression. Nonetheless, Pakistan will always work for and welcome peace in the region.

Climate Change Challenges:

Parallel to the geopolitical challenges lies the threat of climate change. The Prime Minister highlighted the severe impacts of climate change, underscored the unfairness of global justice, and emphasized upholding the principle that “the polluter pays!” Countries like Pakistan emit less than 1 per cent of greenhouse gases globally; however, they face the greatest threats of climate change with exponential financial and development losses. To reverse this growing threat, the world must come together and fulfill the commitments made to developing partners, particularly in climate finance and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

International Financial Architecture:

While SDGs are an important development factor, in countries like Pakistan which are caught in a vicious cycle of debt, the realization of SDGs remains a challenge. The Prime Minister described the “debt trap” as a “death trap,” as he reiterated the UN Secretary General’s remarks about the moral bankruptcy of global financial institutions. He brought attention to the fact that there is an urgent need to reform trade and technology regimes and make them more equitable to promote global equity.

Domestic Reforms:

At the domestic level, the Prime Minister outlined steps Pakistan has taken to stabilize its economy. He stated that Pakistan has recovered from an economic downturn and is moving in the right direction. Inflation is down to single digit; there is more macroeconomic stability; fiscal deficits are in control; and foreign exchange reserves are in a better condition -- all indicators of revived economic growth.

Geoeconomics:

Along with economic revival, Pakistan is prioritizing geoeconomics and connectivity. The Prime Minister restated Pakistan's geographic importance as it sits at the crossroads of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Increased connectivity will bring prosperity to the region and its people. Updating the world on the progress of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he highlighted the successful launch of its second phase aimed at enhancing energy, infrastructure development, and connectivity. To meet this goal more efficiently, the Prime Minister noted, Pakistan through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is mobilizing investments in infrastructure growth, the agriculture sector, minerals, renewable energy, and technology.

Counter-terrorism:

Pakistan has resolutely stood against terrorism. The Prime Minister highlighted Pakistan's success in defeating terrorist groups. In doing so, Pakistan has paid a price that is not just monetary but also in human and economic terms. However, once again, Pakistan is confronted with the threat of terrorism -- one which is externally financed. While Pakistan is fighting this menace bravely, the world must work together to eliminate this threat as well as reform the global counter-terrorism architecture. More importantly, steps must be taken by the Afghan Interim Government to neutralize terror networks on its land that are responsible for cross-border attacks and terrorism not just in Pakistan but against neighboring countries.

Afghanistan:

Afghanistan remains an issue of concern. Talking about the plight of a regular Afghan, the Prime Minister urged the international community to join the UN's appeal for \$3 billion in humanitarian assistance to the war-torn country. At the same time, the Interim Government in Kabul must fulfill international expectations to respect human rights, especially girls and women, and their inclusion into the Afghan societal fabric. Equally important is for the Afghan Interim Government to act upon neutralizing and defeating terror groups inside its territory.

Fight against Islamophobia:

Calling Islamophobia a "troubling global development," the Prime Minister noted different kinds of Islamophobia including the desecration of the Holy Quran, attacks on mosques, stereotyping, and acts of violence and discrimination. However, the most disturbing manifestation of Islamophobia can be witnessed in India. Under the Hindu supremacist ideology, India is aggressively targeting Muslims and systemically erasing the Islamic heritage of the country. To deal with this rising menace, Pakistan along with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the UN seeks to implement an action plan.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the Prime Minister in his address reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast commitment to global peace and security, peaceful resolutions to disputes whether old or new, global financial reforms, and overcoming climate change challenges. In addition, he restated the need for collective global consciousness and responsibility to support the oppressed people like those in occupied Jammu and Kashmir or Palestine, and assured the world of Pakistan's commitment to fighting terrorism, promoting regional peace and cooperation, domestic reforms, and achieving SDGs.