



IPS INSIGHTS

Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Guterres's Farewell Visit: A Tribute to Pakistan's Peace Diplomacy

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The visit of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to Pakistan has a significance that goes well beyond the usual protocol associated with a visit by the head of the United Nations. Coming towards the end of his ten-year tenure, which concludes on December 31, this is in many ways a farewell visit. It is also a visit by a UN Secretary-General who has developed a particularly close association with Pakistan through peacekeeping, climate diplomacy, humanitarian assistance and, more recently, Pakistan's efforts to mediate between the United States and Iran.²

Pakistan has reciprocated that association by conferring the *Nishan-i-Imtiaz*, one of the country's highest civil awards, on Guterres. Significantly, this is reportedly the first time that Pakistan has conferred the award on a serving or outgoing UN Secretary-General. President Asif Ali Zardari presented the honour at a special investiture ceremony at *Aiwan-i-Sadr* on October 6, recognising Guterres's international service, leadership of the United Nations and contribution to global peace and development.³

For Pakistan, however, perhaps the most appropriate way of viewing the visit is through the prism of peacekeeping.

A Friendship Forged Under the UN Flag

Pakistan's relationship with the United Nations has been considerably shaped by its contribution to international peacekeeping. Since 1960, hundreds of thousands of Pakistani military, police and civilian personnel have served under the UN flag in missions across the world. More than 270,000 Pakistanis have now served in 48 UN missions, according to the President's Office. Many have made the ultimate sacrifice.⁴

Guterres has personally acknowledged this contribution. During his visit to the Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS) at NUST on February 17, 2020, he paid tribute to the Pakistani peacekeepers who had lost their lives and described CIPS as one of the world's most important institutions supporting peacekeeping activities. He also laid the foundation stone elevating it to the status of regional hub for United Nations Peacekeeping Training.⁵ The story of CIPS itself goes back

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² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Curtain Raiser: Visit of the Secretary General of the United Nations to Pakistan, 6–8 October 2026," October 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/curtain-raiser-visit-of-the-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations-to-pakistan-6-8-october-2026>

³ Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, "President Confers Nishan-e-Imtiaz on UN Secretary-General," October 6, 2026, https://pid.gov.pk/site/press_detail/34176

⁴ Radio Pakistan, "President Confers Nishan-e-Imtiaz on UN Secretary General," October 6, 2026, <https://radio.gov.pk/06-10-2026/president-confers-nishan-e-imtiaz-on-un-secretary-general>

⁵ António Guterres, "Secretary-General's Remarks at the Centre for International Peace and Stability: Future Challenges to Global Peace and the Role of the United Nations Vis-à-Vis A4P," United Nations, February 17, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-02-17/secretary-generals-remarks-the-centre-for-international-peace-and-stability-future-challenges-global-peace-the-role-of-the-united-nations-vis-vis-a4p-delivered>

to August 2013, when Guterres's predecessor, Ban Ki-moon, formally inaugurated the centre.⁶ There could hardly be a more fitting institutional symbol of Pakistan's contribution to the UN.

From Peacekeeping to Peacemaking

There is an interesting evolution in Guterres's relationship with Pakistan. His 2020 visit to CIPS was essentially a recognition of Pakistan as a major contributor to peacekeeping. His 2026 visit has brought into focus Pakistan's increasingly visible role in peacemaking and mediation.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, Guterres went out of his way to praise Pakistan's role in the US-Iran crisis. He described Pakistan's role as "pivotal" and said Islamabad had helped create the conditions for dialogue between Washington and Tehran. He specifically credited Pakistani efforts with contributing to the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, the subsequent ceasefire and the framework for future negotiations.⁷

This was an unusually strong endorsement from the UN Secretary-General. Pakistan has traditionally been viewed through the lens of its security challenges: India-Pakistan tensions, Afghanistan, terrorism and nuclear deterrence, yet the US-Iran episode has demonstrated another dimension of Pakistani foreign policy: the ability to maintain communication with parties that themselves have difficulty communicating with each other. That is an asset worth cultivating.

Guterres's message from Islamabad was equally significant. He called on the United States and Iran to end the conflict, return to diplomacy and restore navigational rights and freedoms in accordance with international

law. He also reiterated the importance of Palestinian self-determination.⁸ Pakistan could hardly have wished for a more prominent international endorsement of its diplomatic approach.

The Significance of UNMOGIP

It is also noteworthy that the Secretary-General is scheduled to visit the headquarters of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP).⁹

The symbolism is powerful. UNMOGIP is one of the United Nations' oldest peacekeeping missions. Its continuing presence reflects the unresolved nature of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute and the enduring relevance of the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security.¹⁰

Guterres has consistently maintained that the UN position on Jammu and Kashmir is rooted in the UN Charter, relevant Security Council resolutions and bilateral understandings between India and Pakistan. His visit to UNMOGIP therefore carries a significance beyond a routine inspection. It places the Kashmir issue, however indirectly, within the broader framework of the UN's continuing responsibility for international peace and security.

Pakistan should use the occasion not merely to reiterate its familiar position, but to reinforce the larger principle that unresolved disputes can remain sources of instability for generations unless diplomacy is given an opportunity to work.

From Floods to Climate Diplomacy

Guterres's association with Pakistan is not confined to security and peacekeeping. His visit to Pakistan during the devastating 2022

⁶ Centre for International Peace and Stability, National University of Sciences and Technology, "Welcome to CIPS," <https://cips.nust.edu.pk/welcome-to-cips/>

⁷ Dawn, "UN Chief Hails Pakistan's 'Pivotal Role' in US-Iran Conflict, Calls for 'Return to Diplomacy,'" 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/2035169>

⁸ Dawn, "UN Chief Hails Pakistan's 'Pivotal Role' in US-Iran Conflict, Calls for 'Return to Diplomacy,'" <https://www.dawn.com/news/2035126/un-chief-hails-pakistans-pivotal-role-in-us-iran-conflict-calls-for-return-to-diplomacy>

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "Curtain Raiser: Visit of the Secretary General of the United Nations to Pakistan, 6–8 October 2026," October 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/curtain-raiser-visit-of-the-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations-to-pakistan-6-8-october-2026>

¹⁰ United Nations, "Secretary-General's Remarks," UN Press, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21115.doc.htm>

floods left a deep impression. He described the catastrophe as a glimpse of a future of permanent and ubiquitous climate chaos and became one of the most prominent international voices calling for assistance to Pakistan.¹¹

His engagement with the National Disaster Management Authority during the present visit is therefore particularly appropriate. At NDMA, he was briefed on Pakistan's transition from reactive disaster response to a proactive, technology-driven and pre-emptive system incorporating early warning, artificial intelligence, machine learning and advanced data systems.¹²

The message is clear: peace and security today cannot be understood only in military terms. Climate change, disasters, food insecurity, displacement and humanitarian crises are increasingly national-security issues.

What Pakistan Should Take Forward?

The farewell visit of António Guterres should therefore not be treated simply as the departure of a friendly UN Secretary-General. It should be seen as recognition of several strands of Pakistan's international contribution.

Pakistan has been a peacekeeper under the UN flag. It has increasingly sought to become a peacemaker through mediation and dialogue. It has experienced the devastating consequences of climate change and has become an advocate for climate justice. It continues to support multilateralism at a time when the international system is under exceptional strain.

Guterres himself has been a strong advocate of multilateralism. His tenure has coincided with wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the climate emergency, the erosion of confidence in international institutions and growing geopolitical rivalry. His farewell to Pakistan therefore carries an additional message: countries such as Pakistan, which have a stake in a functioning rules-based international system, cannot afford to become passive observers of its decline.

Conferring the *Nishan-i-Imtiaz* is an appropriate farewell gesture. But perhaps the greater tribute Pakistan can offer António Guterres is to continue the work that he has repeatedly encouraged: supporting diplomacy over confrontation, multilateralism over unilateralism and dialogue over war.

There is also a lesson in the journey from Ban Ki-moon's inauguration of CIPS in 2013 to Guterres's recognition of it as a regional peacekeeping hub in 2020, and now his farewell visit in 2026. Pakistan's contribution to international peace did not begin with Guterres and will not end with him.

The blue helmets may be the most visible symbol of that contribution. But the greater opportunity for Pakistan lies in moving from providing troops for peacekeeping to providing ideas, institutions and diplomatic space for peacemaking.

Guterres's farewell visit is therefore not an ending. It is a reminder of what Pakistan can contribute to a troubled international system—and of what it can aspire to become within it.

¹¹ United Nations, "Secretary-General's Remarks," UN Press, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21454.doc.htm>

¹² Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, "Press Release," https://pid.gov.pk/site/press_detail/34171

