

In November 1986, the United Nations released a report on human rights abuses in Afghanistan, which detailed atrocities committed by Soviet and Afghan forces including reprisals against civilians, the torture and killing of prisoners, the forced dislocation of the population, and the booby-trapping of children's toys. In a controversial move, UN officials deleted 13 pages describing these atrocities from the final report. The deletion was said to be due to financial reasons and the pages appeared as an accompanying annex printed in English only.

Facing a stalemate on the battlefield, the Soviet Union launched a concerted diplomatic effort to resolve its difficulties in Afghanistan. In December 1986, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev summoned the Afghan leadership to Moscow for consultations, and on 1 January 1987, the General Secretary of the PDPA, Najib (Babrak Karmel having been replaced in May 1986), announced a ceasefire effective 15 January. He also outlined a programme of "national reconciliation" - a coalition government including the resistance leadership, but with the PDPA in firm control; amnesty for opponents of the régime; the return of Afghan refugees to their homes; official acceptance of Islam as the national religion; and agreement on Soviet troop withdrawal (although no timetable was specified). Moscow signalled its support for the initiative with the visit to Kabul in early January of the Kremlin's two senior foreign policy advisers, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and the former Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin. The Mujahideen, however, rejected the government's overtures and demanded the immediate and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country and the replacement of the puppet régime in Kabul. On the day of the ceasefire, Afghan officials held a news conference announcing the return of government troops to their barracks (they also displayed components allegedly retrieved from two Stinger and one Blowpipe missile, citing them as evidence of American interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs). Despite this, fighting continued throughout the countryside.