

The Afghan ceasefire initiative coincided with efforts to break the impasse at the United Nations-sponsored talks in Geneva. The ninth round of talks, with UN Under-Secretary-General Diego Cordovez mediating between the Afghan and Pakistani delegations, was scheduled to open on 11 February 1987.

Previous negotiations had produced agreement in three areas - non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan; the voluntary return of Afghan refugees to their homeland; and superpower guarantees for the agreements. A timetable for Soviet troop withdrawal remained the final obstacle to a settlement. The Soviet Union offered to withdraw its forces within four years of an agreement, although in talks with Indian officials, Soviet representatives hinted that a two- or three-year period might be considered. Pakistan and the United States called for a complete withdrawal within 3-4 months of a settlement.

The scheduled talks were postponed to 25 February amid a flurry of diplomatic activity. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shahabzada Yaqub Khan travelled to the Soviet capital twice during February for discussions with Soviet officials. Afghan leader Najib and UN mediator Diego Cordovez also visited Moscow to discuss the upcoming negotiations. The Geneva talks finally opened on 25 February, but were overshadowed two days later by an Afghan air force raid against villages and refugee camps in north-east Pakistan in which 70 Pakistanis and Afghans were killed and 200 wounded. Nevertheless, after two weeks of discussions, the gap on the withdrawal timetable had narrowed, the Afghan government offering an 18-month withdrawal schedule and the Pakistani delegation countering with a proposed seven-month schedule. As of July 1987 little further progress has been made in the negotiations.