

A DIFFERENT ROAD MAP

By **MATT REES**/JERUSALEM

FED UP WITH THE FIGHTING, A GROUP of self-nominated Israelis and Palestinians decided to see what kind of peace plan they could negotiate. What they unveiled in Geneva with some ceremony last week reflected common sense in its substance. But politically it was the diplomatic equivalent of a high-tech start-up—full of media hype but little guarantee of success. Some Israelis and Palestinians alike were appalled that unelected delegates should negotiate when the two sides are essentially at war. Palestinian refugees said the plan would eliminate their “right of return” to homes inside Israel, while many Israelis rejected the idea of a deal that did not force Palestinians to renounce that very right. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called the Geneva peace plan a “historic mistake,” and the West Bank leader of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat’s Fatah Party, Hussein Sheikh, rejected the signatories.

The accord’s negotiators argue, however, that this is an important start, that someone had to present an alternative to the violent stalemate of the *intifadeh* and Sharon’s response. Israeli peaceniks, led by former Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, said the proposal is helping Israel reignite debate over substance, which could force the Sharon government to soften its obstructionist policies. The Palestinian delegation said it represents the first serious solution Palestinians and Israelis have accepted.

The problem lies less with the content of the proposal than with its implementation. Arafat responded with limited approval, perhaps because he wants to appear to be a man of peace and thus annoy Sharon. The Israeli Prime Minister has been vehement in

A new, unofficial Middle East peace plan unveiled in Geneva is drawing praise and derision. Here’s what the fuss is about

WHAT’S NEW When the unofficial negotiators met in Geneva, they started from previous maps and proposals for a final settlement made at the last full negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Those talks, an attempt to build on the failed negotiations mediated by President Bill Clinton at Camp David in July 2000, were held in the Egyptian resort of Taba in January 2001. At Taba, talks broke down again over key unresolved issues, and soon after, hard-line Likud leader Ariel Sharon defeated Labor’s Ehud Barak in the election for Prime Minister

BORDERS

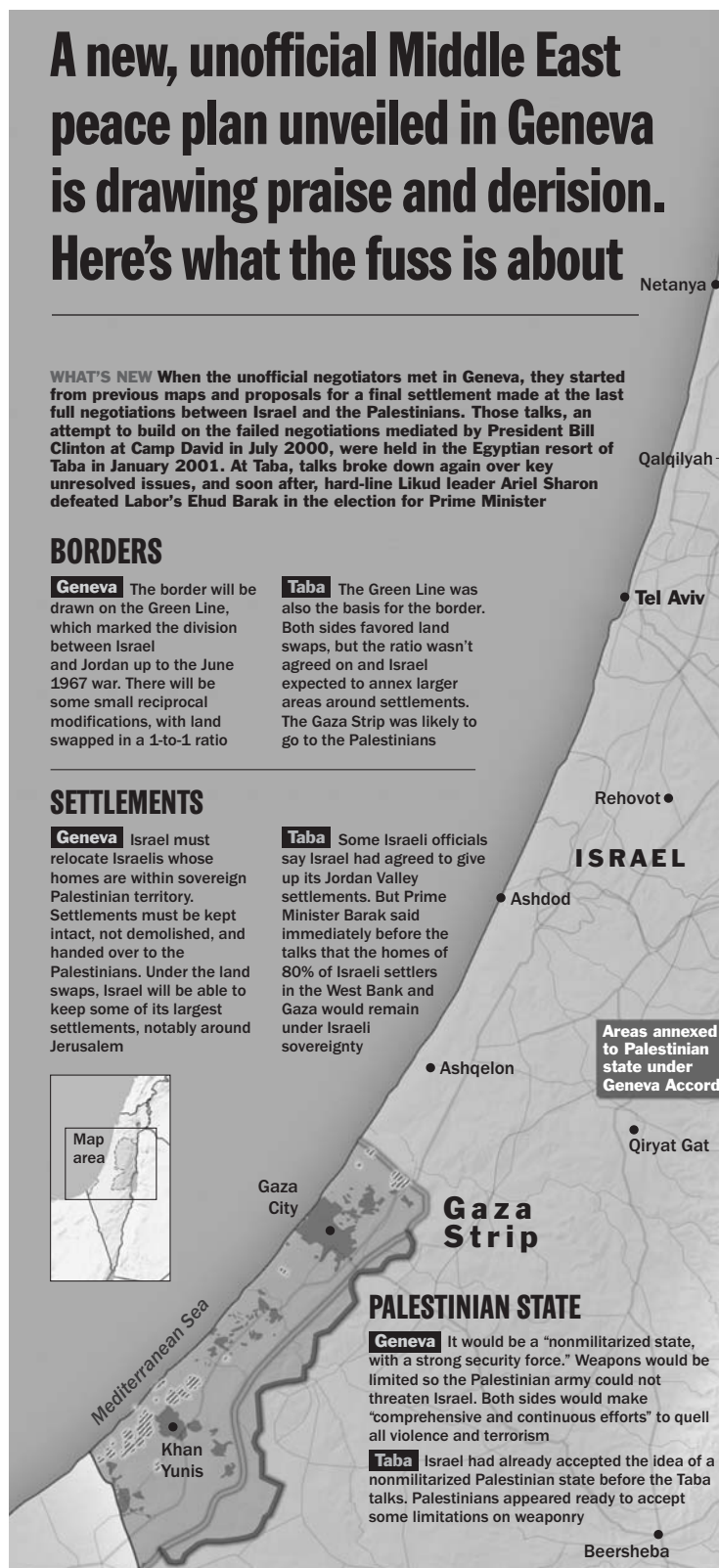
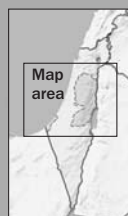
Geneva The border will be drawn on the Green Line, which marked the division between Israel and Jordan up to the June 1967 war. There will be some small reciprocal modifications, with land swapped in a 1-to-1 ratio

Taba The Green Line was also the basis for the border. Both sides favored land swaps, but the ratio wasn’t agreed on and Israel expected to annex larger areas around settlements. The Gaza Strip was likely to go to the Palestinians

SETTLEMENTS

Geneva Israel must relocate Israelis whose homes are within sovereign Palestinian territory. Settlements must be kept intact, not demolished, and handed over to the Palestinians. Under the land swaps, Israel will be able to keep some of its largest settlements, notably around Jerusalem

Taba Some Israeli officials say Israel had agreed to give up its Jordan Valley settlements. But Prime Minister Barak said immediately before the talks that the homes of 80% of Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza would remain under Israeli sovereignty



PALESTINIAN STATE

Geneva It would be a “nonmilitarized state, with a strong security force.” Weapons would be limited so the Palestinian army could not threaten Israel. Both sides would make “comprehensive and continuous efforts” to quell all violence and terrorism

Taba Israel had already accepted the idea of a nonmilitarized Palestinian state before the Taba talks. Palestinians appeared ready to accept some limitations on weaponry

his condemnation of the plan. The Bush Administration, meanwhile, seems to be lending support to Geneva only as a means of pressuring both sides into pushing ahead with Washington's idled road-map peace plan. ■

Questions

1. Why were some Israelis and Palestinians appalled by this unofficial peace plan?
2. How have Israeli and Palestinian leaders reacted to the plan?

