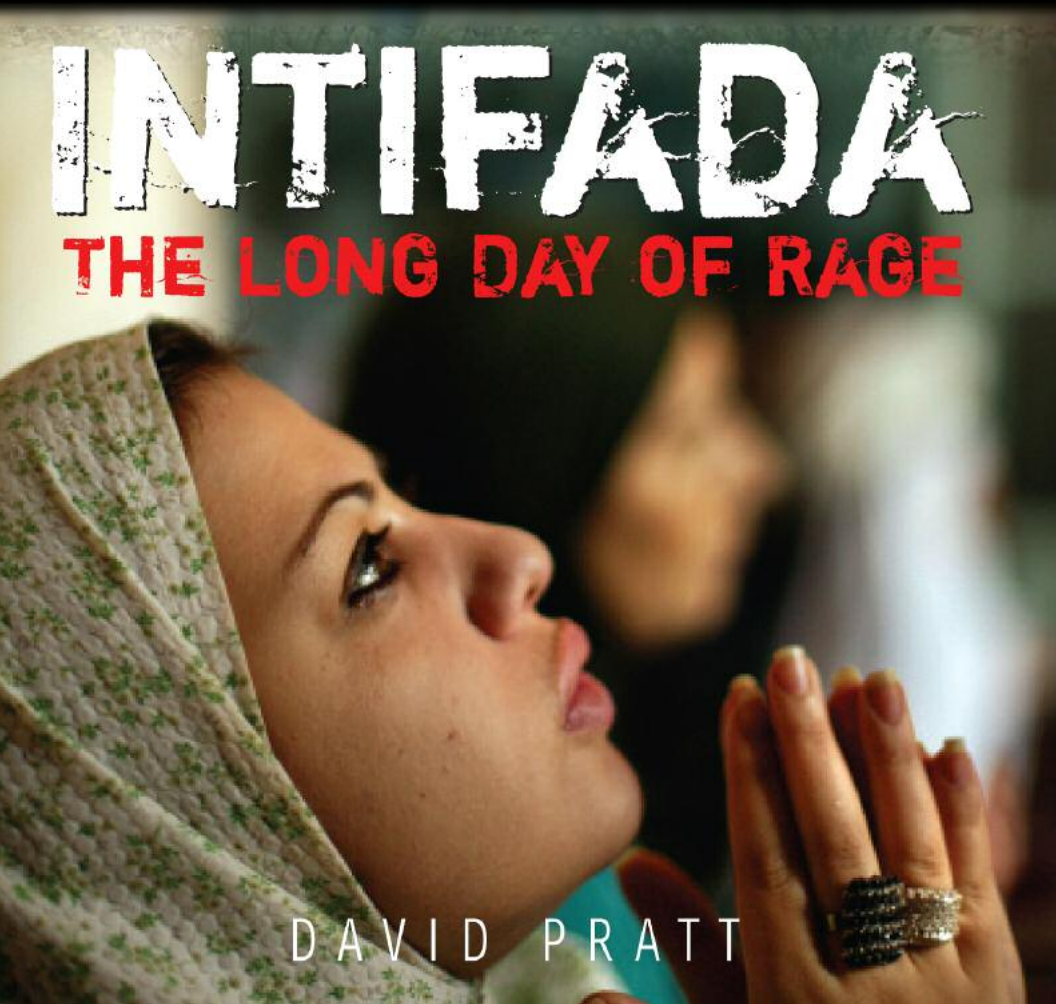
ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

ColdType

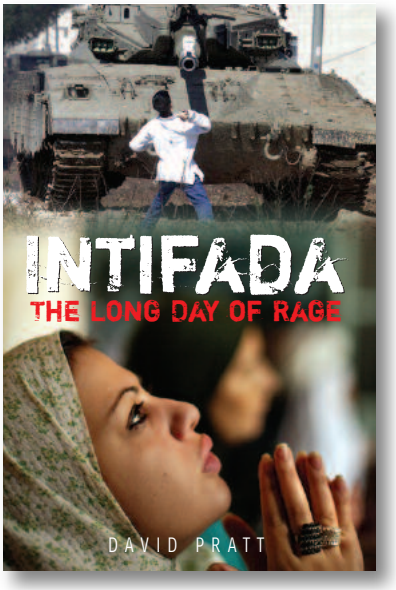
AN EXCERPT FROM

INTIFADA

THE LONG DAY OF RAGE



DAVID PRATT



AN EXCERPT FROM

INTIFADA: The Long Day of Rage

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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During an adventurous career, Pratt has covered wars across the Middle East and Africa, including Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Congo, Sudan and Somalia, and has twice been finalist in the Amnesty International Media Awards for his reporting on human rights issues.

In Afghanistan in 1989, he met Osama bin Laden during a lull in fighting around the city of Jalalabad.

West Jerusalem, September 2004

'These are a way of life here,' said Alon Tuval, loading bullets into the magazine of his Beretta pistol. Feet apart, arms locked, one eye closed, he took aim. After a few minutes he put down the gun, and took me forward to check the results of his shooting. 'One dead terrorist,' he said smiling, the paper target showing three good 'head shots' and a cluster of ripped holes 'well grouped' around the chest.

Having passed with flying colours, Alon returned to the main gun shop attached to the shooting gallery, where the owner renewed the licence for his Beretta and sold him a fresh box of bullets. WINCHESTER – FULL METAL JACKET said the writing on the box. In the display case beneath the counter was an assortment of other guns, saw-toothed 'special forces' knives, knuckle-dusters and telescopic batons for sale. Next to us an elderly Israeli woman, who a few seconds earlier was going though her own locked-and-loaded routine like a veteran SAS man, was now perusing a selection of 'discreet gun pouches' which the manufacturer's slogan on the outside insisted was THE BEST HOME YOUR WEAPON WILL EVER FIND.

'Be sure to wash your hands before lunch, you don't want to get lead poisoning,' Alon told me as I picked up one of the tiny copper-coloured bullets from the table to take a closer look.

I had met Alon Tuval at the Beit Agron Press Centre in Jerusalem where I had gone to renew my accreditation as an overseas visiting correspondent. Housed in a dirty yellow stone building with the surrounding grounds littered with broken glass and smelling of stale urine, Beit Agron was home to the offices of most foreign newspapers and the Israeli Government Press Office (GOP). Whenever the intifada raged, or during other times of political crisis, reporters, photographers and TV crews from overseas would invariably pass through Beit Agron, presenting their own national press cards in exchange for one issued by Israel.

These days, some of them heading into a volatile Gaza or West Bank might also stock up on new body armour from a specialist retail company supplying flak jackets and helmets that sold its products

from a stand on the ground-floor entrance foyer. Inside the building's gloomy corridors foreign journalists could also find Israelis like Alon Tuval more than willing to work as fixers, translators or stringers while any big story was unfolding.

Though himself a journalist and fixer by profession, Alon, like many Israelis, had long since carried a pistol. 'Ever since I was in the army I've tried to practise regularly. These days you never know when you might need it,' he told me that afternoon as we walked to the gun shop and shooting gallery nearby, where he was scheduled to undergo his gun licence 'refresher course'. Inside the shooting gallery, Alon suggested I try a few shots myself using the Beretta pistol. I wasn't keen on the idea. Not because of any ideological or ethical objection, but simply because after years of being around weapons of all types, I was happy enough for guns to be in the hands of those who knew exactly what they were doing with them.

A few times in the past while working in some war zone I had been asked to try using a weapon. Usually the reason for the invitation was for those standing nearby to crack up laughing at my expense, or as some kind of acceptance ritual into the ranks of whatever militia or guerrilla group I was accompanying. I should have learned my lesson after the first time such a situation arose.

It was in the early 1980s, while travelling clandestinely as a reporter in the mountains of Afghanistan with *mujahideen* guerrillas fighting the Russian invaders of their country. 'Shoot, shoot, Mister Daoud,' insisted the commander of my rebel hosts for the umpteenth time, as we rested in a remote craggy valley one afternoon. With his holy warriors looking on, the commander slotted a full clip of the familiar boat-tailed bullets into a Soviet-made AK-47 and thrust the weapon towards me. The time had long since passed for acceptable excuses about journalistic ethics and my non-combatant status. Judging by the looks of the fighters around me, this had simply boiled down to an issue of initiation and acceptance; a very Afghan thing about loyalty and brotherhood. To refuse now would have made my presence at best uncomfortable and, at worst, untenable.

A battered plastic bottle was set up some distance away as a target. As I squeezed the trigger and the first rounds cracked against some rocks reasonably close to the bottle, the gawping bearded guerrillas

who had clustered around began to grin. It wasn't a question of them ever expecting me to fire in earnest, just about passing some strange macho muster.

Once again for some reason that afternoon in Jerusalem with Alon, I reluctantly agreed to go along with a 'shooting lesson'. After a few minutes of instruction from one of the trainers in the gallery, I pulled down my ear protectors and raised the Beretta, squeezing the trigger in the gentle double action way I had been shown. Though clearly I was no sharpshooter, there was something disconcertingly easy about the whole process. How simple it was to lift this small piece of metal and fire these rounds. How comparatively easy to have them hammer home at least accurately enough on target to achieve what the Beretta was made for – killing people. As I watched Alon go through his paces with all the expertise you would expect of a trained soldier, I couldn't help wondering what it must be like feeling the need to carry a gun daily, never knowing when you might be expected to use it. Then it would not be about punching holes in the 'menacing' silhouette of an armed figure in a paper target, but through real flesh and bone knowing that you were taking someone's life.

'Look, David, it's them or us, you have to understand that,' Alon tried to explain, as we tucked into a sandwich in a West Jerusalem café. 'Them or us. Them or us.' How many times now had I heard that phrase, I asked myself? It was back in the days of the first intifada that it had initially struck home, when my Israeli photographer friend Zeev Ackerman explained how he'd once been 'sympathetic to the Arabs', before it had come down to being a case of 'them or us'. Alon, perhaps sensing that such thoughts were going through my head, pressed home his point. 'Just remember what happened at the Sbarro pizza place up the road from here,' he said, nodding over his shoulder in the direction of the café. For a moment in my mind's eye I could see the suicide bomber walking into the crowded pizzeria on the corner of King George and Jaffa Street, around the same time of day as now, just a few years back. 'You think it would have made a difference if someone had been armed?' I asked Alon.

'Maybe yes, maybe no,' he shrugged. 'But we Israelis need to take whatever measures we can to guarantee our security now,' Alon insisted. Life here and now had become all about that one word – security.

But just what had this desperate need for Israel's security meant, I wondered, for the security in the lives of ordinary Palestinians who in the wake of Operation Defensive Shield had perhaps never felt so vulnerable.

Sitting discussing these issues with Alon, it was hard to imagine that it was now four long years to that very week since Ariel Sharon had gone for his now infamous walk across Haram al-Sharif, and the al-Aqsa intifada had erupted in response. As yet another year of killing loomed, many on both sides were becoming ever more concerned as to where it was leading them. According to an Israeli Defence Force estimate in the autumn of 2004, the following 12 months were expected to be a critical period for the Palestinian people and the intifada. 'This year will be the year that will shape the Palestinian struggle. The Palestinian leadership will have to decide whether to aim towards a peace agreement with Israel or to continue with the armed resistance,' was how one senior IDF officer had put it.

In the past, particularly in the years following the first intifada, anniversaries of the uprising had often been opportunities for Palestinians to endorse resistance to the occupation through street demonstrations or an escalation of attacks on Israeli targets. But that year somehow the mood felt different. By now the suicide bombings – like the latest one just a day or so before in the busy French Hill suburb of Jerusalem – had lost the intifada some of its worldwide sympathy. Added to this, a leadership crisis had led many to predict that what really preoccupied Palestinians by then was not the intifada, but an 'intra-fada', an uprising not against Israel but against elements of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, now widely seen as corrupt and politically out of touch. Also having an impact on the intifada and lives of those Palestinians living in its shadow was the slow severing existence of Israel's latest 'security measure', the massive barrier it was busy building across the West Bank.

Later that afternoon following my meeting with Alon Tuval, I travelled the short distance across Jerusalem's Green Line towards my old home from home, the Cliff Hotel, and the nearby village of Abu Dis. I wanted to see for myself just what impact the 'them or us' mindset and Israel's craving for security meant for ordinary Palestinians who were living inside the noose that seemed to be tightening around

their lives and choking whole communities into paralysis and perhaps extinction.

Abu Dis, September 2004

Hassan Akramawi was a Palestinian shopkeeper based on what used to be the main Jerusalem to Jericho Road. When I met him he was suffering from flu, worried about who would pick-up his kids from school, and the effects on his grocery shop of what was simply referred to in this neighbourhood as 'the wall'. 'My business is dead because this wall has cut the street, cut people off from each other and their own families,' he said, his voice shaking with emotion. Perhaps it was the effect of the flu, but I felt a real sense that this was a man hovering on the edge of breakdown.

Outside Hassan's shop the wall ran right across the road. Twenty-five feet high, it sliced through the community, severing Jerusalem from the West Bank village of Abu Dis. In doing so, it had also divided the old road that dropped down into the Jordan Valley. On a clear morning with a wonderful view across the Dead Sea and surrounding hills, I used to love travelling this road. Such was the drop in altitude, to what is the lowest point on earth, you could often feel the pressure change in your ears and the temperature rise noticeably, especially in winter time. Now, because of the wall, the route from East Jerusalem down into the valley would never be the same again. Likewise the lives of countless Palestinians who lived along its path had also perhaps changed forever.

'If you want security for your house you build the wall in your own garden not in your neighbour's,' Hassan complained, increasingly fired-up and distraught, as we talked about the impact the wall had made on the local community. As he spoke I couldn't help thinking of the lines in a poem by American writer Robert Frost:

> Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
> What I was walling in or out,
> And to whom I was like to give offence.
> Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
> That wants it down.

Outside Hassan's shop, the wall's ugly grey cement was pockmarked where rocks had been thrown at it in anger. In bright red painted letters someone had daubed FROM WARSAW GHETTO TO ABU DIS GHETTO. Someone had inscribed that it was PAID FOR BY THE USA, while another asked IS THIS THE WORK OF A MAN OF PEACE? A few children, negotiating an Israeli checkpoint that allowed access from one side of the wall to another on their way home from school, stopped by Hassan's shop for some sweets while we talked. 'This is all I sell now for a shekel or two to the kids. I even take the lightbulbs out because I have to save some money. Life is too difficult to live any more.'

To anyone who has never seen the wall, it's hard to over emphasise the sheer injustice of this concrete scar that gouges its way across olive tree orchards, family homes, grazing areas, places of work, schools and anything else that, frankly, the state of Israel has decided to confiscate. Its sheer physical presence bears down when you are near it. Walking beside it, on either side, you can see Palestinians trying to live their lives under its weight.

'This used to be a beautiful place, now I live in the shadow, no sun, no light, even the air seems bad,' one local Abu Dis farmer would tell me later that day, struggling to make himself heard against the deafening sound of bulldozers working on the next stretch of wall nearby.

The degradation and humiliation of the Palestinians is made all the worse by the employment of some of their men by private Israeli security firms to guard other Arab labourers who work on the wall's construction. 'I know they blame us for this,' admitted one guard, when I asked what he thought of the Palestinian villagers who stood nearby watching as a bulldozer dug up their back garden to lay cables used for high-powered security lights and electrified fencing. 'I know the bitterness they feel, but my family has to eat,' the guard repeated, clearly wrestling with the guilt that came from feeling complicit in such a perceived betrayal. As we spoke, barely a few hundred yards away, I could just make out a few figures hurriedly clambering through unfinished gaps in the wall. They too were Palestinian men, part of an army of 'illegal' workers who daily ran the gauntlet of Israeli military patrols. Once across the wall, Israeli employers waiting for them in cars would pick up the workers. Among these unscrupulous Israeli businessmen, the issue of security clearly mattered less than

ensuring they had an endless supply of cheap labour. The hypocrisy struck me as unbelievable. Time and again I had listened to ordinary Israelis warn of the dangers in their lives from lapsed security. Yet, here were some of them more concerned with making a buck than worrying about the possibility that these Palestinians whom they were willing to 'employ' might just be suicide bombers or gunmen. A few Palestinians taken on as workers no doubt exploited their own role in this capacity to attack Israelis. But for the vast majority, whether employed legally in jobs like security guards and labourers on the wall, or illegally at the bidding of shady Israeli middlemen, it was largely undertaken out of economic necessity. Taking on an illegal job was not something to be considered lightly. On the one hand it meant running the risk of being arrested by the Israeli army or police, and on the other of being called a 'collaborator'. Largely abandoned by the international community, life for many Palestinians caught in this situation had simply boiled down to survival. As the construction of the wall slowly engulfed their lives, they were left to earn a crust as best they could. Not for the first time Palestinians found themselves asking that familiar question, succinctly put by one Abu Dis resident in a documentary film made about the impact of the wall: 'Where is the world? Where is the world?' Why, most wanted to know, had the outside world been so quiet in its condemnation of the wall despite the International Court's ruling that its construction was illegal? Why was it called a 'security' wall at all, they asked, when instead of just separating Israel from the West Bank, it separated Arab from Arab? Indeed, how could a people whose history is full of terrible ghettos, now themselves be building one?

Leaving Hassan Akramawi to the worries of his failing grocery business and the effects of his worsening flu, I walked the short distance that skirts the route of the wall from the main road up the hill to the Cliff Hotel overlooking Abu Dis. As a struggling freelance correspondent covering the first intifada in the 1980s, the Cliff had been the closest thing to home off and on during the years I worked here. In its restaurant or around its pool table, I had whittled away many a day under curfew listening to the crackle of gunfire as yet another riot ensued outside. Then there were those uncertain winter nights in 1991, at the start of the Gulf War, lying in the darkness of my room,

gas mask at the ready, as the sound of Israeli air raid sirens warned of an imminent Iraqi Scud missile attack. At the Cliff I had met fellow journalists and aid workers, celebrated Christmas, held an engagement party, and made friends from among the Palestinian community and around the world. Some of the memories of my time spent at the hotel are among the fondest of my life.

For those reasons alone it was difficult to take in the scene I discovered on nearing the hotel that day. Not only had the wall cut right through its grounds, but the building itself was now used as an Israeli army base and checkpoint. On the roof where I once sunbathed or just took in the spectacular view across the Jordan Valley, a Star of David flag fluttered above a sandbagged watchtower from which two Israeli soldiers peered out through binoculars across Abu Dis. In the gardens where in the evening I would sit reading or listening to the *muezzin*'s call to prayer reverberate across the hills, or watch the sunlight soften on the al-Aqsa mosque, Israeli soldiers lolled around with their M-16 rifles littering the flowerbeds with the remains of their ration packs. Just for a moment my heart ached, and I felt fleetingly a mixture of sadness and resentment that 'my place' had somehow been violated. After many years of working here, it was the closest I had ever come to any real understanding of what most Palestinians had long since lived with – occupation. While in its day the hotel and its owners were no strangers to 'visits' by the IDF, now it had become the army's stronghold in the district.

According to one local Palestinian who asked to be called 'Abu Hamid', just a few days before my visit following the suicide bomb attack in Jerusalem's French Hill suburb, many Palestinians carrying green West Bank ID cards and returning from the capital were arrested and detained at The Cliff. 'Abu Hamid' said that one man was badly beaten by soldiers, who then urinated in his mouth before pushing him from the second-storey roof where I used to spend time relaxing and taking in the view.

As I wandered dazed around the neighbourhood next to the hotel, watching the bulldozers, workmen and soldiers, I came across Ali Ayad, whose cousins were owners of The Cliff as well as my old friends. 'We have been here since 1958. First they confiscated the hotel when we would not sell, and now they cut us off from the rest of our family just

over the other side,' he explained pointing towards Abu Dis. Already, Ali Ayad had paid the equivalent of £1,700 to a lawyer to take up his own case with the Israeli authorities, but admitted it was probably hopeless, given that a military confiscation order had been signed, over which Palestinians rarely had any right of appeal. Knowing this, why then did he pay the lawyer money, I asked? 'Like a blind man who cannot move you take whatever guidance you can get,' he replied. Again it was all about trying to survive. Doing what one could though the odds were heavily stacked against success.

Now, to visit the rest of his extended family, Ali had to travel 10km of Israeli checkpoints and undergo harassment for the sake of the few hundred metres that separated him from his in-laws. Did he think that one day he might see the wall come down? 'If the Europeans and international community stand with us, it will come down. The Berlin Wall fell and who would have thought that possible?' he answered, with that perennial Palestinian optimism.

Most Israelis of course had a very different reaction to the significance of the security barrier. Many, like the country's prominent military historian Professor Martin van Creveld of the Hebrew University, firmly believed that 'walls worked'. Indeed, it was van Creveld who more than 16 year earlier, while giving a lecture to Israeli military commanders at a training college, first proposed the idea of a wall around the West Bank to separate Palestinians from the Jewish state. Van Creveld has freely admitted that he drew his inspiration for this proposal from the Berlin Wall, after he and some colleagues made a visit to the barrier during a year's sabbatical he spent in Germany in 1980–81.

'At first we all said it was terrible, it was inhuman, until our guide stopped us and said, "You don't know what you are talking about. This wall is the best thing that ever happened to this city,"' van Creveld recalls. 'He was a native Berliner and he said that before there was a wall, there was an incident every week. And after the wall was built it had become the most peaceful place on Earth.' Van Creveld was quick to recognise the 'psychological deterrent' that his guide claimed was the Berlin Wall's greatest strength.

'They know that one inch further and they are dead – so 99.9 per cent don't even try,' his guide had told him. Dismissed as it was all

those years ago during his lecture at the military college, by now van Creveld's idea had not only gained legitimacy but the actual wall was being constructed across the West Bank. Despite this, he was far from satisfied, and remained worried that under political pressure over such a contentious policy, Ariel Sharon would not go far enough in building a wall to be reckoned with.

'I just don't want to see a security fence. It is not good enough,' the historian insisted in a *Sydney Morning Herald* interview published just a few months before I returned to Abu Dis to see the result of his 'vision'. 'I want to see a concrete wall, because concrete walls are much more difficult to breach, because the effect will be largely psychological,' said van Creveld unequivocally. 'In theory, if I could, I would build a concrete wall so tall that even the birds could not fly over it. And, above all, so the people cannot look each other in the face – complete separation.' Van Creveld need not have worried: Ariel Sharon would later take the building of the wall to heart. But the historian's remarks said much about Israel's obsession with security and the lengths it was prepared to go to achieve it. Whenever questions about the legality of the wall were raised, Israelis invariably responded with the same answer: 'It stops the bombers and that's all that matters.' For Israelis such as these there was simply no debate to be had. As far as they were concerned the crushing effects of the wall on the lives of millions of Palestinians was a small price to pay for this relative – if somewhat imaginary – guarantee of their own personal security.

'They had their chance, many chances, to rein in the crazies within Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Tanzim, and Arafat blew it,' one Israeli friend summed up, when asked about the legitimacy of shuttering in whole communities behind the concrete and barbed wire rising up across the West Bank. Deep down most Israelis knew that the extent of Arafat's reach and leverage wasn't as long or effective as they imagined, especially among the Islamist groups. But to call it that way made for a convenient defence of a policy they also knew was pretty indefensible in terms of international law. Certainly, the wall's existence helped reduce the number of suicide bombings and other attacks. But it would never stop them entirely so long as the occupation continued, and Palestinians suspected that the motive behind the barrier's construction was nothing more than another land grab. While

such suspicions were not far off the mark, they only partly explained the rationale behind Israeli strategy.

It was back in February 6, 2001, the same night that Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister, that another leading Israeli academic was called to a meeting with Sharon's aides and told to 'bring the maps'. Professor Arnon Sofer was a geographer at Haifa University, who just a few months earlier had given a lecture at the Herzliya Conference on the 'Arab demographic danger'. During the presentation Sofer had illustrated his talk with a series of maps illustrating how 'new borders' should be created, that he claimed would safeguard the Jewish State from being swamped with Arabs. According to an article in the Israeli daily *Yedioth Aharonoth*, both Sharon – then opposition leader – and Sofer talked at the conference during which the professor outlined how the West Bank should be cut into three sections or 'cantons'. One canton would stretch from Jenin to Ramallah, the second from Bethlehem to Hebron, and a third smaller area created around the city of Jericho. Once an 'electric fence' – as envisaged by Sofer – surrounded all three, Israel's worries would effectively be over. Sofer was to stay in touch with Sharon until his election as prime minister, and subsequently insisted that the final map outlining the route of the separation wall was almost identical to his original blueprint. But others believe that Sofer should not have been so quick to take the credit, insisting instead that the idea for the separation barrier had been fermenting in Sharon's mind from perhaps as far back as the mid-1970s. Whatever the truth, Sharon at first was slow to push the idea of the wall any further, even if the wider Israeli public increasingly thought it time for action to be taken.

'The first intifada destroyed the credibility of the greater Israel movement. The second intifada destroyed the credibility of the peace process. People were desperate for something that would get us out of this. They thought if only we put up the fence, things would be better,' said Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli lawyer and civic activist in Jerusalem.

Like the settlers on whose behalf he had long fought, Sharon feared that any physical divide built along the pre-1967 Green Line between Israel and the West Bank would eventually consolidate into the permanent future political border. To concede this amount of land to the

Palestinians was unthinkable, but slowly it dawned on the old campaigner that appeasing his public and holding on to what he believed rightfully belonged to Israel were not mutually exclusive policies. Certainly, by 1999, Sharon is said to have openly spoken of the proposed wall to former Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema, during a brief visit he made to Italy. Even more significantly perhaps, it was the first time Sharon had publicly referred to it as 'the Bantustan plan', explaining to D'Alema that the South African apartheid model offered the most appropriate solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The term 'Bantustan' harks back to the so-called 'independent' homelands created under apartheid for black South Africans. Far from being 'free' and separate, however, these homelands possessed no genuine sovereignty or outside recognition by other states. In effect they were little more than fragmented chunks of land in which the white authorities and apartheid regime forced people to live. In drawing up the Bantustan boundaries, the regime usually ensured that areas of valuable natural resources and arable land fell outside their demarcated area. In short, the Bantustan policy kept anything of value in white hands and the blacks 'in place'.

As a peculiar historical footnote to these proposals, some years ago, during a dinner in my home town of Glasgow hosted for a visiting delegation of veteran African National Congress (ANC) members who had been in the forefront of the struggle against apartheid, one of the delegates told me how Israel and Taiwan had been the only countries that had sought to take up business relations with the Bantustan 'governments'. Historically at least, it seemed Israel had no political difficulty in accepting the Bantustan model. As grotesque a means of control and oppression as it was, Ariel Sharon now also appeared to have no qualms about adopting the Bantustan approach for the West Bank and Gaza, despite the warnings the South African experience had ultimately delivered about the dangers of corralling a people into such a system.

By the mid-1980s unrest in South Africa's Bantustans had descended into widespread rioting, terror and near anarchy. So bad did the situation become that by January 1994 they were finally dismantled. Some Israelis could see the potential for these long-term dangers arising at home, and a few, especially on the far left, opposed

the barrier recognising that it would likely set back any hope of a negotiated peace with the Palestinians. These opponents were few and far between, however, when set alongside the vast majority within the political mainstream, who heartily embraced the wall as their first line of defence against the intifada, and the best means of keeping 'terror' out.

The simple reality of course was that the building of the separation barrier was just another – albeit enormous – brick in the labyrinth of walls and fences Israel had for years been constructing in its attempt to contain the Palestinian population and its uprising. In effect it was the most tangible evidence yet of what Jerusalem-based human rights activist Jeff Halper has called Israel's 'matrix of control'. What Halper meant was Israel's extensive use of settlements, confiscated land, planning laws and checkpoints to herd Palestinians into the spaces it allocates. All of which was aimed at eroding the national consciousness of the Palestinian people, chopping and separating their identities into Gazans, West Bankers, refugees, Israeli Arabs or East Jerusalemites. Almost always this was done in the name of Israel's 'security' but its real goal has been to hinder the growth of a popular Palestinian leadership, and at the same time weaken the intifada. Destroy Palestinian identity and you destroy Palestinian resistance to the occupation, was the Israeli government and military's working maxim.

Livelihood is central to any people's identity, and almost from the start the wall began to deprive many Palestinians of an income as it swallowed up their land. In Abu Dis the collapse of Hassan Akramawi's shopkeeping business or loss of the Ayad family's hotel was only the tip of the iceberg. Across the West Bank there were countless similar personal tragedies, most of which, as ever, were invisible to much of the Israeli public. As the Israeli journalist Meron Rappaport wrote in *Yedioth Aharonoth*:

> Who here cares about farmers like Nimr Ahmed, who in one day lost access to his lands, which he and his fathers had worked for generations. Who cares about a shepherd like Naji Yousef who was forced to sell his sheep because the fence blocked access to pasture? Who is upset that the principal of a high school like Mohammed Shahin of Ras a-Tira was forced to use donkeys to bring textbooks from Kalkilya since all the roads were blocked by the fence?

> Who cares about a doctor from Tulkarm who drives five hours every morning from his house to his job in Kalkilya, a distance of 15 kilometers, because he is forced to go by way of Jenin, Nablus, the Jordan Valley, Ramallah and the trans-Samaria road? This kind of occupation perhaps doesn't kill. Not right away, anyway. But it does destroy the soul.

For Palestinians living in Israel and the West Bank this systematic destruction of the soul boiled down to a life where everything was colour-coded and segregated. Blue car licence plates, green or blue ID cards; special border crossing points away from the eyes of tourists who might find the endless searches and questioning distasteful; 'Arab rooms' at Tel Aviv airport where the interrogations and rummaging through bags and belongings lasts for even longer. Like prisoners in any jail subjected to long periods of confinement and control, such a day to day existence leads to a virtual conditioning of individuals.

The Palestinian writer Raja Shehadeh once told me a story about when he and his wife Penny – herself not even Palestinian by birth – were travelling from their home in Ramallah through Jordan on their way to Europe and the United States on business.

'We were at Amman airport and our baggage had just been checked and cleared by the airport security officials,' recalled Shehadeh. 'Suddenly Penny asked the security man why he hadn't put any stickers on our bags, because at Tel Aviv airport the stickers were compulsory as a sign that you had been cleared and were able to board the plane.' The security official tried to explain to Shehadeh's wife that at Amman airport they only put stickers on those bags that needed more rigorous scrutiny and that the couple's bags were fine and didn't need stickers. 'Just for a moment I could see the look on Penny's face that told me she couldn't quite equate that things were different here, she had become so used to the Israeli way of doing things and the terrible problems it would cause us if we did not have the right stickers.'

Problematic as it was for Raja Shehadeh and his wife to leave their home in the West Bank and venture into the world outside, for them at least it was possible. For countless other Palestinians such a journey would have been like contemplating a visit to the moon.

For as the separation wall grew, the restrictions on movement and economic plight of many worsened daily. Given this, it seems strange

that for a country so preoccupied with history, Israel seemed so quickly to have forgotten the lessons of its own recent past.

After all, it was a little less than two decades ago following years of claustrophobic containment and economic deprivation, that the giant prison that was Gaza boiled over into the first intifada.

Given the obvious parallels between then and the economic conditions the wall has inevitably created today, just what might Israel be stoking up for the future by imposing on the Palestinians this latest massive extension to its 'matrix of control'? Much of what the Israeli government insisted were its real motives behind putting up the barrier and the effects it would have, were more myth than reality. First among these myths was that Palestinians were informed about the wall's construction and given the opportunity to contest the Israeli government's decision. The truth is that while Palestinians were told about the wall's construction, all protests sent by lawyers to the Israeli Supreme Court were flatly rejected with 'security' cited as the reason. Another myth was that the Israelis were building the wall to protect its citizens by preventing Palestinians from crossing into Israeli areas. The reality was that any security wall could have been erected on the international border or even inside Israel and still have met the same objectives.

As it stood, the wall was going up on average six kilometres to the east of the international border, much deeper into Palestinian territory. What's more, this deviation meant that the wall would be almost double the length of the border. Away from Sharon's maps and Israeli myths, it's worth stopping to consider some of the hard facts. Running for 420 miles, the wall consists of reinforced cement, razor wire, electrical fences, trenches, electronic motion sensors, fortified watchtowers and up to three security roads. One road would be used to trace infiltrators, another for army patrols and a third wide one for tanks. All this costs money, lots of it. At around $1.6 million per kilometre the ultimate cost is virtually incalculable, but one Israeli analyst has put the final price tag at perhaps $1 billion. Not that everyone at the heart of the Israeli military establishment believes it is money well spent. 'I don't think the fence will solve all the problems. If I were given that money I would invest it elsewhere,' admitted Moshe Ya'alon, the Israel Defence Force Chief, candidly in an interview in August 2003.

While Israel's wall, like that of its more famous counterpart in China, can now be seen from space, up close it has meant Israeli bulldozers clearing 11,500 square metres of Palestinian land, damaging or wiping out 83,000 olive trees and destroying greenhouses and water networks in more than 39 villages. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, an estimated 10 per cent of the West Bank, home to nearly 50,000 Palestinians, will be incorporated into Israel. Coincidently – just as with South Africa's Bantustans – much of the land to be taken is the richest agricultural territory in the West Bank, and includes the aquifer system that provides 51 per cent of the West Bank's water resources. Far from outlining the wall's route at the outset, the Israelis have consistently altered its direction, keeping the Palestinian Authority guessing, with decisions taken on an almost daily basis. On the ground meanwhile, the line of the barrier takes a looping route to ensure that it encompasses the settlements accounting for about three quarters of the 240,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, mainly those in Ariel and Maale Adumin. This snaking route has inevitably meant the creation of isolated Palestinian enclaves such as the town of Qalqiliya where the 40,000 residents are completely surrounded by the barrier with only one way in and out through an Israeli checkpoint. Cut off from farmland and wells, Palestinians in Qalqiliya are reduced to seeking permission from the Israeli army to access what by right belongs to them. Those who don't can pay a heavy price, as in October 2003 when a few farmers from the village of Jayous, near Qalqiliya, crossed from the West Bank side of the wall through to the Israeli side with their families to gather their crops. Later that day when they tried to return, soldiers stopped them from getting back to their village. Eventually the women and children were allowed to cross, but some 70 Palestinian farmers were forced to stay outside the wall by their land for almost nine days. All the time Palestinians were paying such a punitive price, the Israeli government was insisting that the requisition of property in the occupied territories was legal according to Article 23(g) of the 1907 Hague Regulations, which states:

> In addition to the prohibitions provided by special Conventions, it is especially forbidden to destroy or seize the enemy's property, unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war.

In other words, in building the wall and appropriating Palestinian land, Israel says it was entitled to do so 'by the necessities of war'. However, as international lawyer and former war crimes investigator Paul Troop, in an article entitled 'The Reality and Legality of Israel's Wall', points out, Articles 46 and 55 of the same Hague Regulations clearly state that private property must be respected and that the occupier is regarded only as an administrator and therefore must safeguard such properties. In addition Israel – despite being an actual signatory to the document – is clearly in breach of articles 53 and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which forbids the destruction of property and confinement of persons by an occupier. Indeed, under the Fourth Convention the taking of such property can amount to a 'grave breach' which potentially could leave Israel open to charges of committing a war crime.

Travelling across the West Bank as the unrelenting construction of the wall continued, I found it difficult not to be overwhelmed by an all-pervasive impression of coloniser and colonised. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the slow obliteration of Arab East Jerusalem. It was in the tenth century that the great Arab geographer Mohammed ibn Ahmad al-Muqaddasi once boldly claimed that the city united the pleasures of this world with those of the next. These days, notions of unity in any shape or form are about as distant as those times in which Muqaddasi lived. Slowly, the wall is disconnecting East Jerusalem, and with it fades any hopes Palestinians had that one day it might be their capital in a state of their own. Perhaps Muqaddasi's other famous observation that Jerusalem was also 'a golden basin filled with scorpions' more aptly catches the mood of Palestinians in the east of the city as their sense of community is eroded and their dislocation from the West Bank becomes complete.

As the wall slices through several districts separating children from their schools, shopkeepers from their stores and family members from each other, there is a new and growing rage among Palestinian Jerusalemites. Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli lawyer who specialises in relations between Palestinians and Israelis in Jerusalem, points out that there are almost a quarter of a million Palestinians living in the city and that most of them are going to find themselves on the Israeli side of the fence. 'It's the first time there has been a serious intent to build

a wall around the city since the 16th century,' he says. 'It's certainly the biggest change to Jerusalem since 1967.' He also draws attention to the fact that over the past four years since 2001 there had been less than 200 individuals arrested for involvement in acts of terror. 'I don't make light of that; some of them acted with devastating effect, but 200 arrests is about the yield of two weeks in the West Bank,' Seidemann observes. The fact that the Palestinians of East Jerusalem have not participated in any significant numbers in the violent, deadly aspects of the intifada, says Seidemann, is 'not because they are Israelis', but because in the east of the city there is what he calls a 'delicate ecosystem' of comparative coexistence. 'It is my fear that by building the fence the way we are, we are preventing suicide bombers from coming into the city at the expense of the radicalisation of the population of East Jerusalem. And if indeed my forecast is correct we will miss the placid days that we had in 2001 to 2004.'

Should Seidemann's worst-case scenario prevail, then it would also effectively put to rest the least convincing myth the Israeli government has peddled regarding the wall – the question of its 'permanence'. It's only temporary, they have frequently been heard to say; nothing more than a stopgap measure to help kick start peace negotiations, which if they prove successful will enable Palestinians and Israelis to live alongside each other without the need for walls. Few ordinary Israelis buy this government line, happy in the certainty that their leaders will never sell them out on the issue of 'security'. Palestinians meanwhile understandably scoff at the idea that the Israelis would ever voluntarily dismantle the wall. The cost alone leads many to doubt the viability of such an undertaking, while historic precedent doesn't inspire confidence in the government's claims. Palestinians point out that they have been here before, when a similar procedure was used by Israel to take control of Palestinian land for a 'temporary' period to let them establish Jewish settlements. Most of those settlements still stand across the West Bank, and with the exception of Gaza where the myth of 'disengagement' there was widely seen as part of a longer-term political strategy, Israel shows little intention of giving up any of its appropriated land. 'Two things are certain about Israel,' said Muhammad Maraabi, the Deputy Mayor of Ras Atiya, a Palestinian village south of Qalqiliya. 'It never returns your land and it never pulls down walls

it puts up.' If indeed the wall is ever to fall, then a political solution with or without the pressure of the intifada must be found. But as the shutters come down, many Palestinians are quick to point out that patience among a younger generation who have watched friends and families suffer at the hands of the Israelis is in seriously short supply.

Fearful of an intifada against the wall, at the core of which would lie even more violence and the devastating Israeli retribution that would undoubtedly follow, some Palestinians have advocated a different approach. Given the obviously emotive reaction the wall invokes, not to mention its undoubted illegality, isn't it the perfect issue on which once again world sympathy for their plight might be galvanized, they ask? To maximise this potential, some political elements within the Palestinian community have started advocating a new kind of intifada, a non-violent and mass civil disobedience campaign like the sort put forward by Arun Gandhi – grandson of India's illustrious freedom campaigner Mahatma. In recent years Arun Gandhi has visited the West Bank to witness for himself the conditions under which Palestinians live, the effects the wall is having in compounding their difficulties, and to discuss how any fightback campaign might be conducted. But, as Jonathan Cook wrote in a perceptive piece in *The Guardian* around that time, what Gandhi and his supporters failed to understand is that a non-violent struggle requires specific conditions that are not present in the current intifada. 'The first and most obvious condition is that non-violence should carry with it the moral weight that makes violent retaliation unconscionable. If the experience of the first and present al-Aqsa intifada proves anything, however, it is that non-violence by Palestinians is rarely reciprocated by the Israeli security forces.' Given this, most likely it will once again be a new generation of militant *shebab*, who will take the fight over the wall onto the streets.

If, as some Middle East observers suggest, the construction of the wall is a virtual death sentence for the Palestinians, then its creation also signalled the defeat of hope for those Israelis who clung to the idea of a negotiated peace. 'You leave us no room to grow, you leave us no room to live,' argued Jamal Juma of the Palestinian Environment Association, in an impassioned interview with the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* about the wall in May 2003.

> You want us to live like slaves. It won't work. If you had built the fence along the Green Line, there would be no problem. This way perhaps you'll have quiet for four/five years, but you will create only hatred. Instead of 20 per cent Hamas, you'll have 60 per cent.

Juma's words were to prove prophetic, as the Palestinian people, their movement and intifada, moved to confront these latest challenges over their human rights and hopes of ending the occupation.

Standing on the hilltop at the Cliff Hotel that day when I visited the construction site of the wall there, it became clear that this razor cut across Palestinian land, hopes and collective psyche, was perhaps the biggest threat ever to those seeking to resist the juggernaut of Israeli political and military ambitions in the territories. Little did I or anyone else know then, that an unpredictable new era was dawning that would see the Palestinian old guard decimated and the emergence of a very different kind of leadership.

What reviewers said about the British edition of Intifada - The Long Day Of Rage

"PRATT has both the knowledge and the perception to understand and describe what was happening in 2000 and 2001, what happens today and what is likely to happen in the future. Pratt is too much of a journalist to forget that it is the people who live the story every day, not the foreigners who chose to cover their plight, who are important and the book is crammed with revealing vignettes and well-observed dialogue. A conscientious journalist who takes time to get things right." – **Jason Burke,** chief reporter with the Observer in London and author of the bestselling books *Al'Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* and *The Road to Kandahar.*

"INTIFADA draws heavily on Pratt's extensive time in the field, constantly ducking and diving in riot-torn Palestinian towns, he is very good at conveying the adrenaline fuelled and addictive business of covering the front line. Intifada will chime with all Middle East correspondents, past and present. – **Philip Jacobson**, *Frontline Club London, online review.* Jacobson is a veteran foreign correspondent who has reported on conflicts around the world for The Times, Sunday Times, and Sunday Telegraph among others."

For full review http://www.thefrontlineclub.com/club_articles.php?id=79

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Comments about the North American Edition

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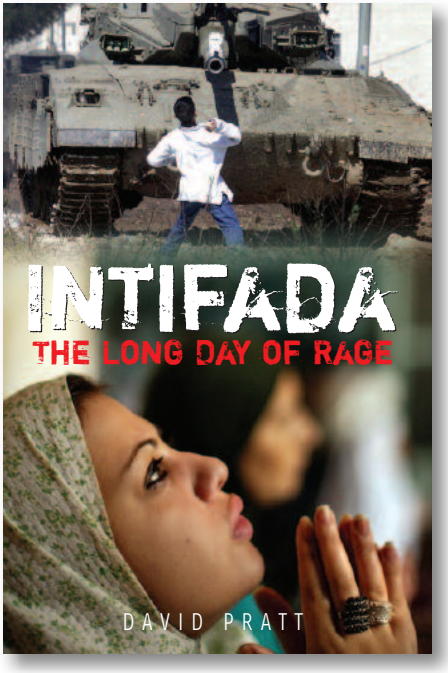

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