

# The REAL DEAL

## Building the Wall: Does it make sense?

### The Facts

**Government spending on border militarization has not led to fewer undocumented immigrants crossing the border.** Since 1986, the border patrol's budget has grown by over 500%, to over \$5 billion. Next to defense spending, this represents one of the highest growth rates in the federal government's budget. From 1993 to 2004, the number of Border Patrol agents tripled (from about 4,000 to about 11,000) and the amount of spending has increased more than five fold (from 740 million to 3.8 billion) yet the number of undocumented immigrants still doubled (from 4.5 to 9.3 million in 1994.)

**Barriers, more agents and more militarization of border shifted migration to more remote and dangerous areas.** Fences in one area just push migration to other areas where fences often cannot be built due to the difficult terrain. Migrants crossing at nontraditional sectors increased from 29% in 1988 to 64% in 2002. Nearly 2000 people have died during that same period (1998 to 2002).

**Since late 1994, the government has spent more than a billion dollars on Operation Gatekeeper, but the new strategy has not prevented border crossings.** It has simply shifted them to the mountains and deserts east of San Diego. Meanwhile, migrant deaths have increased by 500%.

**In the past ten years, there have been more than 2,640 border crossing-related deaths** – 10 times more lives

than the Berlin Wall claimed during its 28-year existence. In FY 2005, there were a record-breaking 473 migrant deaths at the US-Mexico border; over 260 were on the Arizona border.

**By 2002, the Border Patrol was the largest arms-bearing branch of the U.S. government, excluding the military.** Automatic weapons have been incorporated into routine immigration patrols. Ten years ago, the border patrol mainly used .357 handguns; now they use the M-16, a military-issue automatic rifle.

**Over the past 15 years, civilian border patrol groups have grown exponentially, and have acquired significant political strength.** In April 2006, the Minutemen announced a national campaign to add 6,500 "civilian" agents to the border to arrest migrants.

**Current border policies negatively affect the fragile ecosystem near the border.** Several species that rely on the ability to cross the border between U.S. and Mexico are endangered, such as the American jaguar.

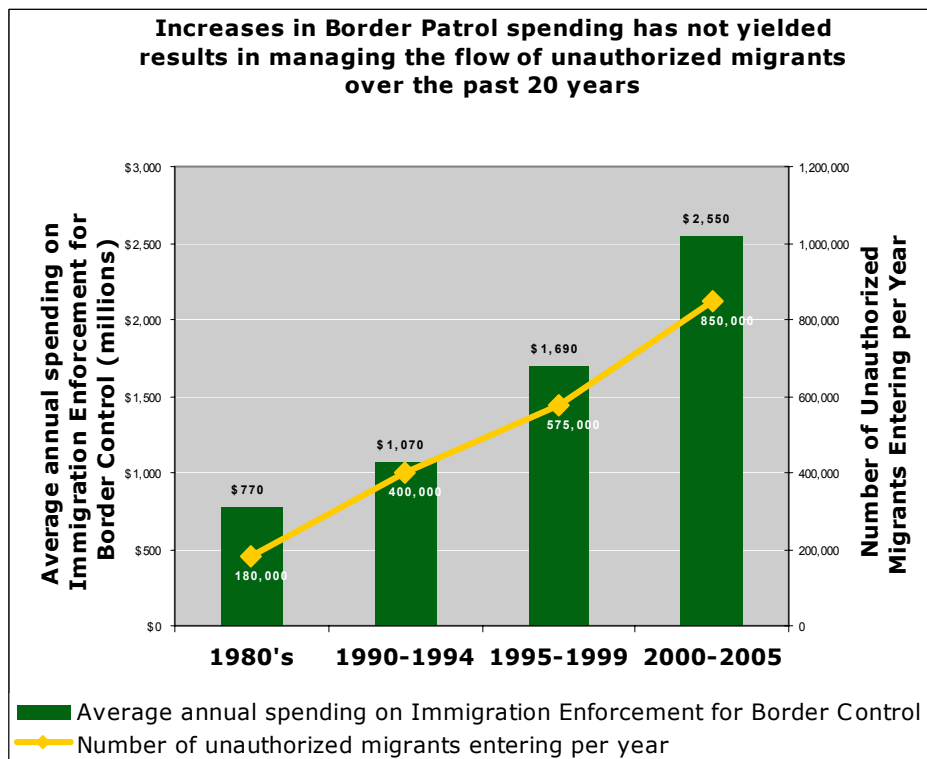
### The Border: Myths and Realities

**Myth: Pouring money into border security will end illegal immigration**

**Reality:** The reality is that \$30 billion dollars of border enforcement spending have resulted in an increase, not a decrease of migration. For the past 15 years, the government has attempted to "seal the border," by building walls, using military-style tactics and operations (like Operation Gatekeeper), and doubling the number of border patrol agents. These tactics have not worked. Most experts agree that economic opportunities in the U.S. and Mexico have a stronger effect on migration than does heightened enforcement.

**Myth: Building double or triple fences will stop migration**

**Reality:** Building fences channels migration to other places, usually more remote and dangerous terrain. For example, after triple-fencing was constructed in San Diego, apprehensions of undocumented immigrants dropped 300% between 1994 – 2002, but apprehensions in the Tucson sector increased 342% during this same period.<sup>5</sup> Our government has claimed credit for re-



ducing immigration in San Diego, when in reality, migration moved elsewhere.

### **Myth: New Border Patrol strategy is necessary to keep terrorists out**

**Reality:** Apprehending any terrorist, foreign or native-born, depends on the gathering of intelligence indicating that someone poses a threat to national security and is either planning to enter the country or is already here. The new Border Patrol strategy doesn't focus on security – it focuses on more of the same. The new National Border Patrol Strategy of 2005 is the same as the old “prevention through deterrence” strategy. The Border Patrol focuses on “high traffic” areas. From a security standpoint, this is a needle-in-a-haystack approach to intercepting foreign terrorists.

### **Myth: More border security keeps border communities secure and safe**

**Reality:** In case after case, citizens, legal immigrants, and undocumented people have been stopped and their immigration papers demanded, solely on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, language, or accent. In the border region, even Latino federal judges have been stopped and required to produce immigration documents upon demand.<sup>6</sup> Border communities have reported harassment and intimidation by border patrol agents, with little or no response to complaints filed by community-based organizations.<sup>7</sup>

### **Myth: Border patrol's “deterrence” policy of forcing migration to dangerous entry points will convince migrants to stop entering the U.S.**

**Reality:** Border deaths are on the rise because people are being forced to take dangerous routes to enter the U.S. More people are dying than ever before and are using more dangerous means and smugglers in desperation. Border patrol policies are not stopping migration.

### **The Impact of Militarization on Border Communities**

Juan Cruz-Torralva brought his 12 year old daughter, Lourdes, to the U.S. because “I just wanted her to get a good education.”<sup>9</sup> He had planned to take her to Oxnard, Calif., where his wife was living with the couple's 2-month-old son. He wanted to enroll Lourdes in school and work in the strawberry fields. Near the last leg of their three-day journey, a U.S. Border Patrol agent ran over Mr. Cruz-Torralva and his daughter with his truck near Dateland, Ariz. Yuma County Sheriff's detectives ruled the incident an accident. Mr. Cruz-Torralva was returned to Mexico by federal immigration officials. “My daughter is dead, and my mom and dad are sick,” he said. “I've been in jail for a week, I don't have any money, and I'm in pain. I just want to leave this place and never come back,” he

added, wiping tears from his eyes. “Never.”

In November 1995, a 12-year old girl was play-camping with a friend in a vacant lot behind her home in Pirtleville.<sup>10</sup> As she slept curled up in a ball in their tent, she awoke suddenly to a sharp pain invading her knee. She had been shot. A bullet went through her knee and missed her head by five inches on its exit from her body. According to the Border Patrol agent's account, he shot at them because he thought that they were illegal immigrants or dogs. The young girl was rushed to the hospital where she had the first of many surgeries to restore her knee. The agent was suspended with pay and later transferred to another Border Patrol station. The girl's family sued the Border Patrol, but the case is still in court.



The photo was taken along the U.S.-Mexico border. © Photo by Curtis Daily.

<sup>1</sup> Evaluating Enhanced US Border Enforcement, May 1, 2004. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=223>

<sup>2</sup> The US-Mexico Border, Migration Information Source, June 1, 2006. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=407>

<sup>3</sup> “Opportunity at the Borders,” Government Security, Technology Solutions in Defense of the Homeland, June 1, 2006. [http://govtsecurity.com/mag/opportunity\\_borders/](http://govtsecurity.com/mag/opportunity_borders/)

<sup>4</sup> Center for biological diversity, [www.sw-center.org/swcbd/search.html](http://www.sw-center.org/swcbd/search.html)

<sup>5</sup> “Fencing in Failure,” American Immigration Law Foundation, March 2005, [http://www.aifl.org/ipc/policy\\_reports\\_2005\\_fencinginfailure.asp](http://www.aifl.org/ipc/policy_reports_2005_fencinginfailure.asp)

<sup>6</sup> How the Latino Community's Agenda on Immigration Enforcement and Reform has suffered since 9/11, [http://www.maldef.org/pdf/NHLA\\_report.pdf](http://www.maldef.org/pdf/NHLA_report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Justice on the Line, Border Action Network, <http://www.borderaction.org/PDFs/BAN-Justice.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.stopgatekeeper.org/English/facts.htm#\\_1](http://www.stopgatekeeper.org/English/facts.htm#_1)

<sup>9</sup> “Jailed migrant whose daughter was killed wants return to Mexico,” KVOA TV Channel 4 Tucson, March 14, 2006

<sup>10</sup> “Justice on the Line,” Border Action Network, <http://www.borderaction.org/PDFs/BAN-Justice.pdf>

**For more information about the border, please see:**  
*National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights:*  
[www.nnirr.org](http://www.nnirr.org)  
*Border Action Network:* [www.borderaction.org](http://www.borderaction.org)  
*Coalicion de Derechos Humanos / Alianza Indigena Sin Fronteras:* [www.derechoshumanosaz.net](http://www.derechoshumanosaz.net)

*Authored by Paromita Shah*

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