

# The walls in the global village

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## Abstract:

*The paper refers to the subject of rapid growth of the number and length of border walls understood sensu largo as all kinds of engineering and military constructions performing the functions of political screens protecting and strengthening the border. The authors attempt to answer the following questions: 1. Where and who is currently building border walls? 2. Why are decisions to build border walls made? 3. Do border walls meet the expectations of the decision-makers?*

## Keywords:

**border wall, border, borderland, globalization, security**

## Link:

[http://www.pogranicze.uni.opole.pl/biblioteka/docs/tom6/jankowski\\_zenderowski\\_t6n2.pdf](http://www.pogranicze.uni.opole.pl/biblioteka/docs/tom6/jankowski_zenderowski_t6n2.pdf)

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## **Introduction**

Border walls have existed almost since the beginning of the history of man. People have always had a need to mark their space and isolate themselves from others and strangers. Even the first agglomerations were surrounded by simple ramparts protecting the residents from attacks. The antiquity and the Middle Ages saw city walls as the symbol of power and wealth of their constructors. Technological development made these constructions bigger and more sophisticated with observation points, check points and advanced defense systems. Walls stopped encircling single cities and started delimiting state borders. They began to symbolize conflict, hostility and fear, with the Maginot Line being the best example of it. The second half of the 20th century was dominated by barriers and divisions. The Cold War separated two major political blocks with a number of border walls, for example the Berlin Wall.

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One might think that after 1989, in the globalized world, borders are not hermetic anymore neither for international capital and financial markets, ideas and ideology nor for people. The specific example of it is constituted by the Schengen area, where internal border controls have been resigned from. However it is the globalized world in which the most border fortifications in the history are built and more and more states declare their will to build border walls due to the migration crisis.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze that phenomenon. Thus we are asking the following questions:

1. Where and who is currently building border walls?
2. Why are decisions to build border walls made?

### **The paradox of globalization**

The history of humankind has always shown a tendency for building walls. People have always felt the need to mark their space, separate from strangers, demonstrate the fact that „they are at their own place” by erecting all types of fences and fortifications. Numerous walls separated towns and countries, manifesting their strength and wealth of their creators. They regulated the flow of people and goods and, as *Limes*, they constitutes borders of civilizations, protecting Roman citizens from invasions of the barbarians (Rosière and Jones 2012: 220).

It would seem that in the era of globalization and common access to the state-of-the-art technologies which enable us to travel large distances in a short time and to transfer ideas, thoughts and values at virtually no cost, the institution of a border wall is both archaic, comic and bizarre. However, the 20th century was an arena of great divisions and barriers, shaped by the „Iron Curtain”, the most recognizable of them being the Berlin Wall. The beginning of our century seemed different to many of us. On the one hand, geopolitical transformations symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, on the other hand the development of technology, especially the popularity of communication means and the Internet, were to transform our world. Many scholars and commentators presented the vision of a „global village”, the world of free flow of information, ideas, people and capital, which seems to hold no space for such archaic structures as border walls. But it is this globalized world that witnesses the biggest number of border walls being created in the whole history of humankind. They become a topic of fierce public debate, gathering as many supporters as opponents. The evidence can be seen in the recent election campaign in the United States, where

one of Donald Trump's promises was to build the wall on the border with Mexico which, along with other postulates, was, according to the candidate, to „make America great again” (Vallet and David 2012: 113).

Border walls are being erected faster and faster. The data published by Elizabeth Vallet from University of Montreal shows that there are over 60 structures of this type operating at present, most of them being erected after 2001 (Vallet and David 2012: 112-113). In spite of their declared temporariness, they are becoming more and more complex structures (Brown 2010: 32-33). Movement and heat detectors, surveillance cameras, check points and ground radars supplement many physical barriers and may even replace them in the future, building the so-called intelligent or virtual walls (Vallet and David 2012: 112). It seems we are witnessing some kind of hysteria – panic caused by serious changes in local social and cultural landscapes, stimulated by the media-hyped images of approaching barbarians, whose aim is to conquer a particular civilization. Undoubtedly, some of the erected border walls stem from populism and fear of strangers, cleverly stimulated by politicians and the mass media rather than from cool calculation devoted to provision of security to citizens dwelling in a particular country. It must be said that a wall, as an architectonic structure associated unambiguously with security, perfectly fits in the discourse on ways of dealing with the increasingly dangerous world.

Surprisingly, it is... Europe that leads the border wall construction contest. In 2012 Greece decided to erect an over 10-kilometer long fencing in the valley of the Evros (Marica) river, closing the border with Turkey for illegal migrants. The initiative was supported financially by Frontex. In the following year Bulgaria did the same. In 2015 Hungary, Macedonia, Austria and Slovenia erected fencings, closing migration routes leading through their countries. The United Kingdom took similar action, building a 3.2-kilometer protecting the British part of the Eurotunnel against migrants from the Calais „jungle”. Fearing the Russian invasion, the government in Kiev announced its plans to build the border fencing. Following Ukraine, similar plans were announced by Estonia and Latvia, whereas Norway is considering such steps (Besenyő 2017: 81-84). A detailed list of the existing and planned border walls is provided in table 1 below.

How can we explain this contradiction with the liberal values, so popular in „Europe without borders”? We might be witnessing a clear dissonance between the publicly declared values (openness to other cultures, tolerance, readiness to provide asylum, etc.) and the social and political practice aimed at „sealing” borders and closing oneself in a fortress. It is worth mentioning that most border walls are not erected on the borders of Europe or the European Union. The newly-built

border walls separate countries which belong to the Council of Europe or the European Union. And it is this fact that should constitute a source of concern and encourage opinions on the future of the European integration (Diez 2006: 235-238; Donnan and Wilson 2007: 82; Vallet and David 2012: 115).

**Table 1. Border walls erected in 1945-2015**

Country which erected the wall	Country or area separated by the wall	Date of erection (removal)
Vietnam	China	1946 (1979)
Bulgaria	Turkey	1947 (1989)
Czechoslovakia	West Germany	1947 (1989)
Czechoslovakia	Austria	1947 (1989)
East Germany	West Germany	1947 (1989)
Soviet Union	Finland	1947 (1989)
South Korea	North Korea	1953
North Korea	South Korea	1953
France (Algeria)	Morocco	1957 (1962)
France (Algeria)	Tunisia	1957 (1962)
USA (Guantanamo)	Cuba	1961
Zimbabwe	Zambia	1966
South Vietnam	North Vietnam	1967 (1968)
Israel	Egypt	1968 (1973)
Israel	Syria	1973
Israel	Lebanon	1975
Republic of South Africa	Mozambique	1975
Soviet Union	Norway	1976
Morocco	Western Sahara	1980
Soviet Union	Finland	1978
Israel	Jordan	1981
Egypt	Gaza Strip	1982
Republic of South Africa	Swaziland	1985
Republic of South Africa	Zimbabwe	1986
Thailand	Cambodia	1987
India	Pakistan	1989
Kuwait	Iraq	1991
Spain (Ceuta)	Morocco	1993
Malaysia	Thailand	1993
Israel	Gaza Strip	1994
Spain (Melilla)	Morocco	1998
Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	1999
Israel	Lebanon	2000
Thailand	Malaysia	2001

<b>Country which erected the wall</b>	<b>Country or area separated by the wall</b>	<b>Date of erection (removal)</b>
Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	2001
Uzbekistan	Afghanistan	2001
India	Bangladesh	2002
Israel	West Bank	2002
Botswana	Zimbabwe	2003
India	Myanmar	2003
Zimbabwe	Botswana	2003
Saudi Arabia	Yemen	2004
Uzbekistan	Kazakhstan	2004
United Arab Emirates	Oman	2004
Brunei	Malaysia	2005
Pakistan	Afghanistan	2005
USA	Mexico	2005
China	North Korea	2006
Jordan	Iraq	2006
Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	2006
Iran	Pakistan	2007
North Korea	China	2007
Saudi Arabia	Iraq	2009
Saudi Arabia	Qatar	2009
Saudi Arabia	Oman	2009
Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates	2009
Myanmar	Bangladesh	2009
Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	2009
Israel	Egypt	2010
Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	2010
Azerbaijan	Armenia	2011
Israel	Jordan	2011
Greece	Turkey	2012
Bulgaria	Turkey	2013
Iran	Afghanistan	2013
United Kingdom	France	2014
Hungary	Serbia	2015
Macedonia	Greece	2015
Austria	Slovenia	2015
Slovenia	Croatia	2015
Ukraine	Russia	2015
Latvia	Russia	2015
Estonia	Russia	2015

Source: own elaboration based on: Carter and Poast 2017: 15; Hassner and Wittenberg 2015: 166-167; Jones 2012a: 10.

In this paper we use the term „border wall” broadly understood, mostly as all types of engineering and military structures which perform the function of political dividers, protecting and consolidating the border. In literature the terms of „fence” and „barrier” are more popular. The above words point not only at the physical differences between particular structures, but they also have different semantic meanings. Commonly understood, the word „wall” has much more negative connotations than the word „fence”. Particular countries avoid terms with negative connotations, giving their structures specific names, as India did, calling the wall running through Kashmir „Line of Control”. This can also be seen in different ways of calling the same structure by different parties. For example, for Israel, the structure erected in West Bank is „security fence” or „anti-terrorism fence”, whereas for the Palestinians it is an „apartheid wall” (Jones 2012a: 11; Vallet and David 2012: 115).

### **Do good walls make good neighbors?**

The policy of creating or recreating borders in the spatial dimension is a consequence of changes in relations between countries, nations and identities. The question of why countries decide to take such costly actions as building border walls, concerns directly the function of a state border itself. For centuries borders constituted a line of defense, a fortified buffer zone, the first point of resistance when attacked by an enemy. Often vast borderland areas or border zones of unclear status physically separated particular countries. Historically this was the most important function of border walls, performed by Hadrian’s Wall, the Great Wall of China, and more contemporary structures, such as French fortification systems: *Séré de Rivières* and Maginot Line (Jones 2012a: 9; Moraczewska 2008: 17; Otok 2011: 81). The twentieth century demonstrated the ineffectiveness of these installations and currently only some borders perform military functions, for example the demarcation line in the Korean Peninsula. Most of such structures are the remnants of the Cold War conflicts (Besenyő 2017: 78; Rosière and Jones 2012: 220).

The development of statehood transformed the linearly understood border into the indicator of territorial control and sovereignty of particular states. However, currently borders do not function in the same way as they used to. The internationalization of economic processes, globalization of culture, increasing flow of people, goods, ideas and finance led to the opening of borders and consequently, weakened their control (Otok 2011: 81; Rosière and Jones 2012: 220). Borders no longer protect countries against supranational phenomena and processes. Organized criminal groups, mass migration movements, etc., get out

of the authorities' control (Moraczewska 2008: 38-40). It is this feeling of fear and instability that seems to be one of the main reasons that walls are erected. Walls become a material and symbolic manifestation of the state border, the evidence of greatness, strength and sovereignty of their builders and determiners of identity. However, not everybody believes that border walls strengthen the state sovereignty. Wendy Brown points out that the analyzed tendency only manifests the weakness of the state. A strong, independent state does not have to build walls to demonstrate its power (Brown 2010: 21). Regardless of the above, it should be noticed that a border wall, as an element of border architecture and as a symbol, constitutes an exceptionally clear message directed both inside and outside the state.

The disappearance of the military function performed by borders does not mean that border walls do not perform the protective role, since this function evolves. The main goal of contemporary border walls is not to hold off the conventional military attack, but to protect against dangers, both real and alleged. Border walls are to prevent the entities, called by Peter Andreas „secret transnational actors”, such as: illegal immigrants, organized criminal groups, spies, terrorists, etc., from entering the territory of the state (Andreas 2003: 78-111). This tendency has been particularly visible since the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001. Reece Jones from University of Hawaii in Manoa lists 25 border walls built in 2000-2011, whose declared goal is to perform the protective function, mostly against acts of terrorism. These are the walls erected on the borders of: Tunisia, Nigeria, Kenya, Israel and India (Jones 2012a: 10-11). Contemporary border walls are also to protect against uncontrolled inflow of migrants. This is particularly visible in Europe, where many countries nearly simultaneously started work on sealing their borders in 2015, when migration into the Old Continent took on such spectacular and unusual form.

The erection of a border wall is often a sign of hostility, border dispute or even conflict between countries (Brown 2010: 28). Political transformation initiated in 1989 brought an increasing number and intensity of such disputes and, as a result, countries participating in them more and more often decide to consolidate their borders (Donnan and Wilson 2007: 17). An example of this phenomenon may be the wall built by Kuwait on the border with Iraq after the 1st Gulf War, whose goal was to confirm the sovereignty and integrity of the state. In the post-soviet area, as a result of conflicts with neighbors, walls were erected by Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, which was to confirm and consolidate the territorial status. Botswana, Morocco and Republic of South Africa took similar action. It seems, however, that the goal behind erecting these walls had more to do with politics than defense. This is an encoded message sent to the neighboring country, demonstrating hostility (Mora Tebas 2016: 5).

A border wall may constitute an attempt at appropriating the disputed territory, occupying or controlling it and integrating it with one's own territory. Some walls, such as Indian Line of Control in Kashmir, or Moroccan *berm* in Western Sahara, were erected in the area of unclear political status. These walls are determined by the lines of armistice (Biger 2013: 97, 100-104).

Many of the contemporary walls exist inside states. They are effects of internal conflicts among representatives of various ethnic groups and religions. The above mentioned casus of *berm* constitutes the best example of it. Western Sahara includes a number of fortified earth dikes of the separating-defense functions, which are remnants of fights between the Moroccan army and the Polisario Front. Another example is the internal city wall in Nicosia separating Greek and Turk inhabitants. (Biger 2013: 100-101, 104). A new illustration of the phenomenon is constituted by a wall erected in Baghdad. It originally separated the district of embassies and central administration buildings for the purpose of their protection against terrorist attacks. It was later developed and started to separate Shiites from Sunnites (Bright 2007). Currently the state authorities consider encircling the whole city to prevent attacks of so called Islamic State (Stefanicki 2016).

A special case of this phenomenon are numerous border walls erected by Israel which, according to many authors, constitute a form of territorial expansion and occupation (Brown 2010: 28-29). The Israeli authorities claim that the only goal of the wall is to ensure security of the state and Jewish settlements, however, as early as during the construction of the first wall in 1967 many Palestinian public institutions and residential houses were destroyed. The „protective fencing”, built in 2003 along the so-called green line, in many places diverts from it, going deep into the West Bank territory, separating Jewish settlements from the rest of Palestine (Till 2013: 53, 56-57). This resulted in confiscating over 3.6 thousand acres of arable land, destruction of Palestinian crops and houses. According to the data of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs from July 2008, this enabled Israel to take over approximately 9.8% of the territory of West Bank. After completing the erection, nearly 13% of the barrier is located in the territory of the green line and Israel, whereas the rest lies inside West Bank. This, combined with the system of road checks and other restrictions, limits free movement on around 50% of the territory of West Bank, significantly worsening access to schools and medical facilities (Barak-Erez 2006: 540; Bell 2004-2005: 298; Qato 2007: 263-265).

However, most walls built after 1989 have been erected on quiet borders, free from conflicts. A clear tendency is that the countries building walls are usually much richer than their neighbors. Reece Jones calculated that in 2010 the average

annual GDP *per capita* of the countries which erected border walls after 1989 was USD 14067, whereas the average annual GDP for the separated countries was only USD 2801. For example, in 2010, GDP *per capita* in the USA was USD 47 thousand, whereas in Mexico – only USD 14 thousand. Border walls constitute an economic and social barrier, separating the poor from social resources and security offered by rich centers of global economy (Jones 2012b: 72). This phenomenon was called by Mike Davis „a great wall of globalization” (Davis 2007: 172). Building walls is therefore an attempt at separating the poor and also a symbol of sharp divisions between the First and the Third World.

The state border performs a determining function, consisting in separating various cultures, values and ideas, giving the society a feeling of community and national identity (Moraczewska 2008: 32). Borders play an important role in creating and maintaining the nation and the state. Dividing the world into what is inside and what is outside, they constitute a line of identification and division into „Us” and „Them” (Donnan and Wilson 2007: 43-44). This is not only a physical division, but also a division deeply rooted and engraved in people’s minds, who more and more often do not understand and fear or even feel hostility towards strangers. Thus walls are an instrument of protecting culture practices, lifestyle and identity, which are also threatened by the inflow of migrants, who share a different system of values (Donnan and Wilson 2007: 20, 44, 84; Jones 2012a: 15, 23, 70, 72). Such argument was raised by, *inter alia*, Hungary, which justified the erection of the fence on the border with Serbia with an argument concerning protection of European values. Countries building border walls are often convinced of their civilization superiority over the countries they separate themselves from. For example, in the USA, India and Israel the building of the walls was accompanied by hot discussion in which participants pointed at uniqueness of members of their own community, negative features of strangers, which often took the form of dehumanizing and depriving their neighbors of human rights (Jones 2012a: 15).

### **Are border walls profitable?**

A question should be posed whether border walls are actually capable of accomplishing the above goals. High costs of building and maintaining border walls, sometimes amounting to millions of dollars a year, question the rationality of decisions to erect them (Dowler 2015: 89). The expenditure on building and operating border walls has been growing rapidly. So far the USA has spent USD 2.4 billion on building the 670-mile fence on the border with Mexico (Gulasekaram 2012: 156). A nearly 150-mile wall erected in 2010 on the border with Egypt cost

USD 400 million (Flores 2017: 10), whereas the annual maintenance costs incurred by Israel for the wall erected in West Bank is USD 260 million (Cannon 2016: 26). The costs of building 2700 miles of berm equals 40% of Morocco GDP (Hassner and Wittenberg 2015: 181).

In spite of those huge investments relatively little is known about the effectiveness of walls. According to Israeli Ministry of Internal Affairs the number of illegal immigrants crossing the border with Egypt fell from 17 thousand in 2011 to only 43 people in 2013. Equally promising are the data showing an 80% fall in the number of victims of terrorist attacks initiated from Gaza Strip. Experts, however, question the credibility of the above information, pointing at much greater significance of other measures adopted by the Israeli government, including, for example, changes in the law making legal economic migration easier for qualified workers (Ehrman 2007: 47; Flores 2017: 10-11). On the other hand, Frontex estimates that fences protecting Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla decreased the number of illegal migrants from 47 thousand in 2000 to nearly 1.5 thousand in 2016 (Besenyő 2017: 79-80). However, the unexpected consequence was seen in the growing number of organized attempts at crossing the fences, in which sometimes as many as a few thousand migrants participated, as well as the growing number of attempts at reaching Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. It is hard to believe that fences can stop mass migration. Walls are as good as their guards. They can always be deceived, bribed or avoided. Even the longest walls always end somewhere, leaving the inevitable space (Cannon 2016: 29-30; Mora Tebas 2016: 15). The examples of fences built by Greece and Bulgaria on the border with Turkey and by Hungary on the border with Serbia, as well as many others, demonstrate that these structures cannot stop migrants. They can only make their life more difficult, forcing them to seek alternative routes. This offers opportunities for organized criminal groups specializing in smuggling people and goods, for whom taking control over migration routes is a lucrative source of money, estimated at as much as US\$ 16 billion annually (Brown 2010: 112; Mora Tebas 2016: 14).

It seems more likely that border walls perform a psychological function. They cannot physically defend borders and provide safety, but they give the society the feeling of security and comfort. Thus they satisfy the need of the society and their construction is politically attractive. However, in practice, the erection of walls seems to manifest the helplessness and even hysteria and proves that we do not control the situation (Brown 2010: 108; Gulasekaram 2012: 169).

Attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of border walls we should take into consideration their consequences for social relations. For the separated

communities the wall is a form of humiliation, helplessness and subordination. It is the basis on which frustration or even hatred, grow. In the long run it brings radicalism and violence. Even if in the end the walls are demolished, social divisions and tensions will remain for many years, making the reconciliation and implementation of peace programs difficult.

## Conclusions

Referring to the first question asked in the introduction to this paper it needs to be stated that the process of erecting new border walls has its global character and it is especially intense in Europe, which is still considered to be a land of welfare and peace in the increasingly insecure world. The second concluding remark is that the main reasons behind the decisions to erect border walls are: the desire to stop illegal immigration; preventing the influx of terrorists; reinforcement of borders in case of an aggression from a neighboring state; will of appropriation, occupation or gaining control over a large area and integrating it with own territory; separating sides of international and internal conflicts; maintaining cultural and civilization integrity (no consent to influence of elements of foreign culture). And finally, it is difficult to unequivocally answer the question on efficiency of border walls. It is rather an encouragement to ask further and more detailed questions related to the subject of effectiveness.

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# Mury graniczne w globalnej wiosce

## Streszczenie:

*Artykuł podejmuje problem gwałtownego przyrostu liczby i długości murów granicznych rozumianych szeroko jako wszelkiego rodzaju konstrukcje inżynieryjne i wojskowe, pełniące funkcję dzielników politycznych, zabezpieczających i utrwalających granicę. Autorzy podejmują próbę odpowiedzi na następujące pytania: 1. Gdzie i przez kogo budowane są obecnie mury graniczne? 2. Dlaczego decydenci polityczni podejmują decyzję o budowie murów granicznych?*

## Słowa kluczowe:

**mur graniczny, granica, pogranicze, globalizacja, bezpieczeństwo**