

PORTFOLIO

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Documenting Border Barriers

Pamela Dodds

About the Art

Documenting Border Barriers is an ongoing research-based artwork in etching and relief printmaking that addresses the exponential rise in fences and walls that have been built on the borders of nations and territories to keep people out. Each print details a specific border barrier in the world today, based on documentary photos, texts, and reports.

The technique combines drypoint etching and relief printmaking. Drawings are scratched into a rectangular plexiglass plate using an etching needle and abrasive tools. A thick ink is then spread on the scratched surface and wiped clean, leaving ink in the abrasions. Finally, the plate is pressed on paper with a manual etching press. Surrounding details are omitted to portray the razor wire, cement, and steel with visceral immediacy. An impression of landscape and sky are evoked with an under-printing of wood grain patterns. In some prints, printed window screen creates the impression of chain link. The prints, each unique in detail yet similar in composition, bear witness to the violent policies of exclusion and lack of concern for the lives of people on the move.

About the Artist

Pamela Dodds' artwork in printmaking, painting, and drawing explores personal vulnerability and the complexities of human relationships. She is inspired by a curiosity about how human beings succeed or fail to engage across barriers, whether intimate, societal, or historical. Her work is exhibited regularly in solo and group exhibitions in Canada and the USA, and also in Spain, Norway, the UK, and Mexico. She has been employed as a master printer and educator and invited to speak in university classrooms and conferences. Her work has received generous support from Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, and Gottlieb Foundation (NY). Collectors include Boston Public Library, Massachusetts, Purdue University, Illinois, Capital One Bank, Ontario, and Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

Documenting Border Barriers debuted at Open Studio Printmaking Centre Gallery, Toronto, in 2022, and has appeared at Border Walls and Borderlands International Colloquium, University of Quebec, Montreal (UQAM), 2022, and Museo de Arte, Nogales, Mexico, 2023, in partnership with Association for Borderlands Studies, AZ. A selection of the prints was presented at the International Biennial of Contemporary Printmaking, Trois-Rivières, Quebec, 2023. Future exhibitions are pending.

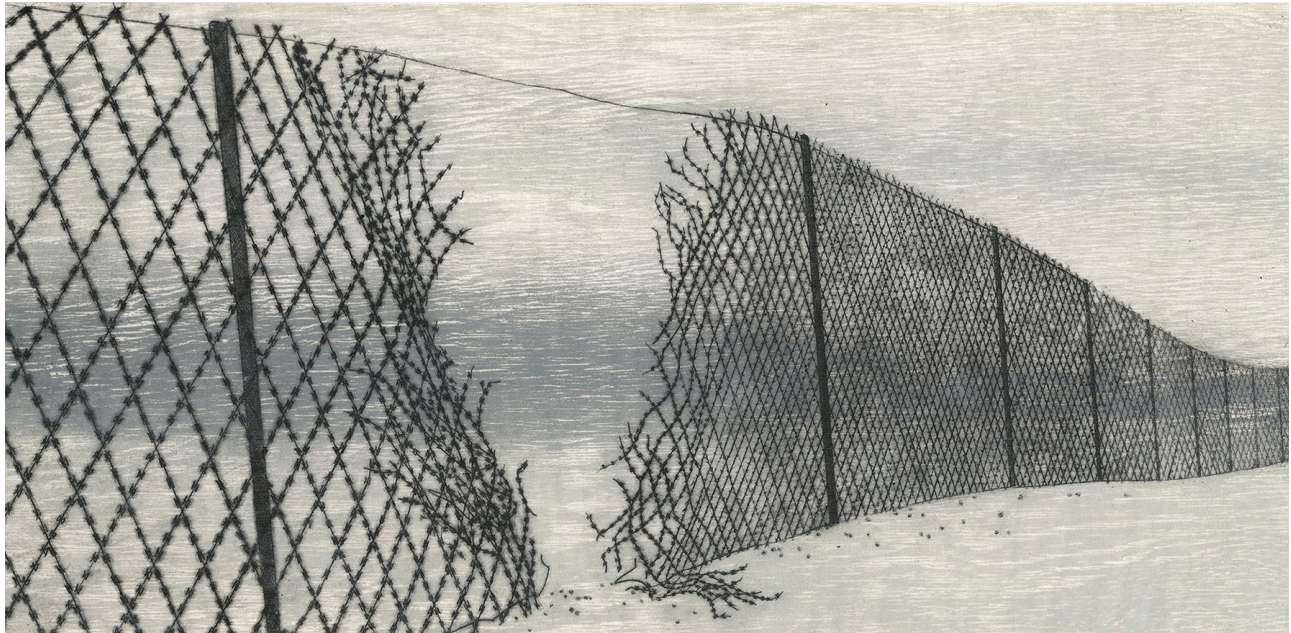
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11x19 in. / 28x48 cm, drypoint etching & relief print on paper

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South Africa—Zimbabwe Border Barrier

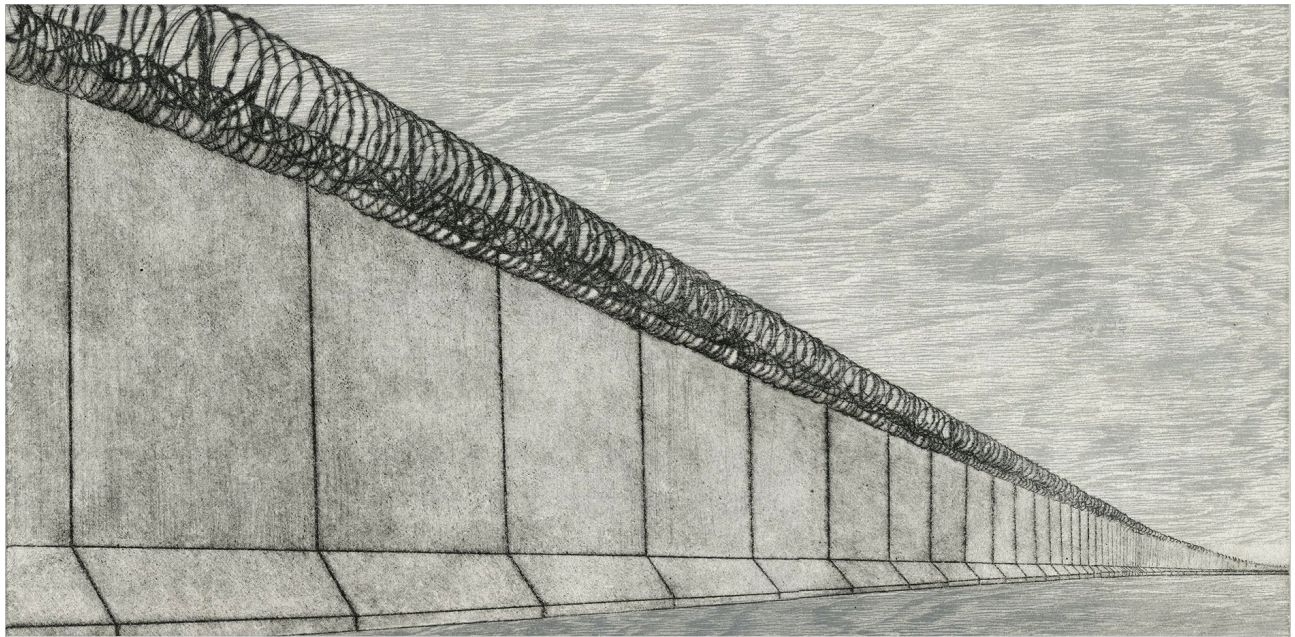
Length of Barrier: 40 km / 25 mi. **Length of Border:** 225 km / 140 mi.

Date Started: 2020. **Built by:** South Africa.

Location: On the South Africa side of the Limpopo River, which is the border, in the area of the Beit Bridge Border Crossing, the busiest border post in southern Africa. During the apartheid era, South Africa barricaded its borders with lethal (continuous charge) electric fences. In the 1990s the power was turned off. The fences fell into disrepair as migration and daily crossings increased.

Description: 1.8 m/ 6 ft. fence made of razor wire mesh.

Purpose and Context: Anti-migration, anti-Covid-19. Migration to South Africa is primarily for economic reasons. The new barrier was included in Covid-19 emergency actions, but as soon as it was erected, the “border jumpers” easily cut holes in the thin razor wire mesh. The expensive, yet ineffective fence became a political scandal. As yet, no new barrier has been built. Instead, military patrols and daily arrests have increased.



11x19 in. / 28x48 cm, drypoint etching & relief print on paper

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Turkey—Syria Border Barrier

Length of Barrier: 828 km / 515 mi. **Length of Border:** 909 km / 565 mi.

Built: 2014–2018. **Built by:** Turkey.

Location: The entire accessible length of the border.

Description: 7-ton concrete blocks topped with razor wire. Each block is 3 m / 10 ft. high and 2 m / 6.5 ft. wide. Fortified with 120 surveillance towers, military patrols, thermal cameras, land surveillance radar, remote-controlled weapons systems, imaging systems and seismic and acoustic sensors.

Purpose and Context: Anti-migration. Turkey accepted nearly 3 million, mostly Syrian, refugees through this border. Many people continued migrating into Europe. But as European countries began barricading their borders, Turkey built the wall to prevent further migration. The EU and Turkey have made several deals to control migration into the EU including financial incentives to Turkey for retaining refugees, forced return of migrants to Turkey, and re-opening talks of Turkey joining EU.



11x19 in. / 28x48 cm, drypoint etching & relief print on paper

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Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

Length of Barrier: 248 km / 154 mi. **Length of Border:** 248 km / 154 mi.

Built by: North Korea, China, UN. **Date Started:** 1953.

Location: The DMZ between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) is centred on the 1953 Korean Armistice cease-fire line along the 38th parallel, bisecting the peninsula coast to coast.

Description: From the cease-fire line, the DMZ extends 1 km / 0.6 mi. to both the North and the South. It is one of the most heavily militarized borders in the world, patrolled by thousands of soldiers with tanks, artillery, surveillance robots, and over 1 million landmines. An additional fenced buffer zone extends to the South ranging from 5-20 km / 3-12 mi. from the line. The border features tourist attractions, including binoculars to glimpse the other side, while vast remote areas have reverted to natural ecosystems.

Purpose and Context: At the end of WWII, Korea was divided into the USSR-occupied North and USA-occupied South. Northern invasion of the South in 1950 instigated the devastating Korean War. With the 1953 Armistice, the DMZ was established, yet the two Koreas remain technically at war. The border is completely sealed. Families are permanently separated.



11x19 in. / 28x48 cm, drypoint etching & relief print on paper

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Bulgaria—Turkey Border Barrier

11x19 in. / 28x48 cm, drypoint etching & relief print on paper, 2023

Length of Border: 513 km / 319 mi. **Length of Barrier:** 150 km / 93 mi.

Built: 2014–2017 **Built by:** Bulgaria

Location: Along the border. During the communist era, this border was highly militarized and barricaded with a barbed wire anti-exit barrier. It was dismantled in 1989.

Description: 4.5 m / 15 ft. steel and chain-link frame filled and topped with coils of razor wire; some sections have been cut by traffickers and migrants.

Purpose and Context: With the rise in people migrating through Turkey to Europe, the new anti-migrant barrier was built. As the Greece–Turkey border barrier has been increasingly fortified, migration to Bulgaria has increased again. Most try to cross through the Strandzha Nature Park, often walking for days through the forest without food or water. Pushbacks and violence, including lethal violence, are common.



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India—Bangladesh Border Barrier

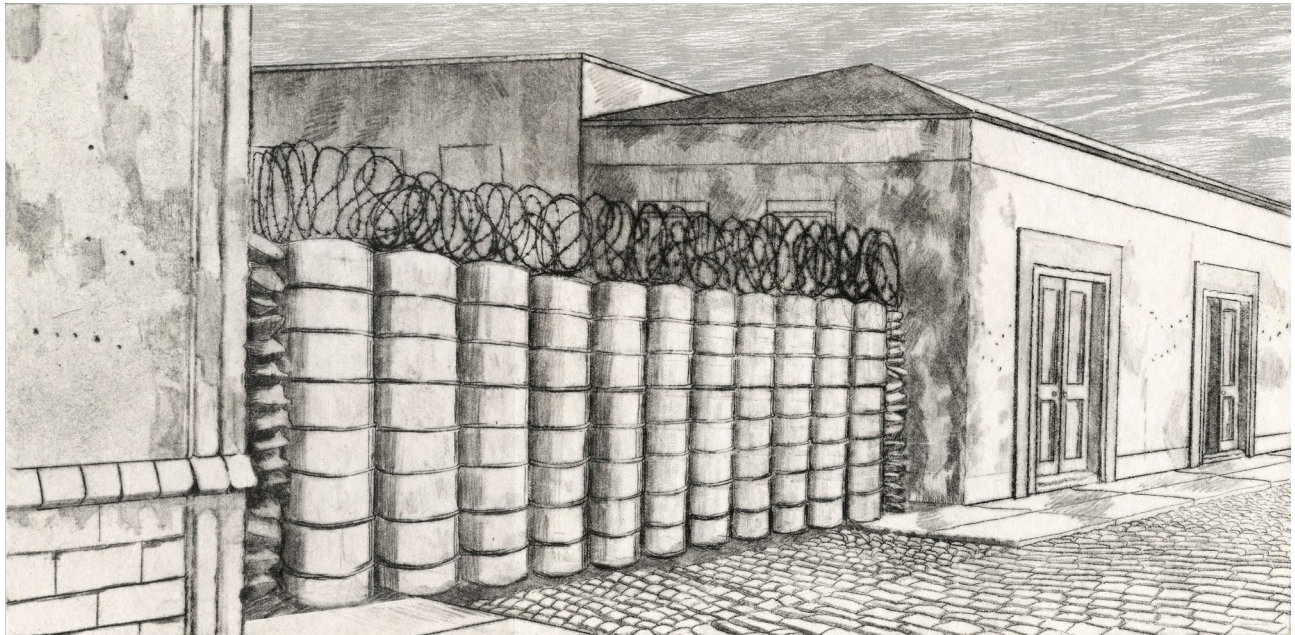
Length of Barrier: 3140 km / 1950 mi. **Length of Border:** 4097 km / 2545 mi.

Phases: late-1980s, 2008, 2010 with ongoing upgrades and technological enhancements.

Location: The barrier follows the Radcliffe Line, infamously named for Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who in 1947 drew the boundary partitioning British India, despite never having visited the country. The barrier intermittently follows the entire border, almost completely encircling Bangladesh, bisecting numerous villages and communities.

Description: Parallel 2.5 m / 8 ft. barbed-wire fences on either side of double rolls of barbed wire. Some sections electrified. Brick walls divide some villages. Sonar sensors are used in delta areas. Surveillance includes flood lights, underground and underwater sonar, armed patrols.

Purpose and Context: Anti-migration, anti -cattle and -drug smuggling. The barrier has divided families and communities. Most migrants are Bangladeshis trying to cross for economic, family, health or environmental reasons. Reportedly this is one of the most dangerous borders in the world. The border guards are known to lethally shoot people with impunity, causing as many as 6 deaths per month in some years.



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Cyprus UN Buffer Zone and Barrier, at Nicosia

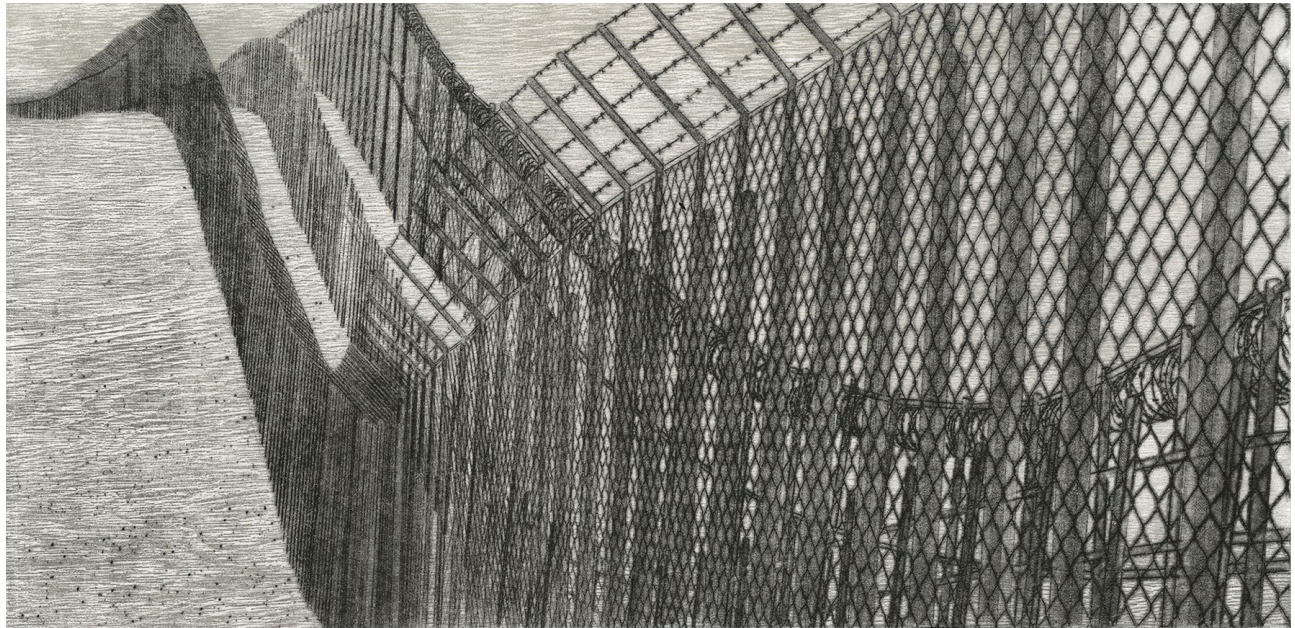
Length of Buffer Zone Barrier: 180 km / 112 mi. **Length of de facto Border:** 180 km / 112 mi.

Date Started: 1974. **Phases:** 2021: Anti-migrant barriers added. **Built By:** Cyprus, UN

Location: The island of Cyprus is recognized internationally in its entirety as the Republic of Cyprus. The Buffer Zone bisects the island, including the capital city of Nicosia, separating the Turkish North from the Greek South. The North is a *de facto* state recognized only by Turkey. The new anti-migrant fence fortifies a 20 km / 12 mi. rural area along the Buffer Zone.

Description: Anti-migrant fence: Coils of razor wire. The Buffer Zone, which varies in width from 10 metres to 7.5 km / 32 ft. to 4.5 mi., includes fences, walls, stacked sandbags, cement-filled oil barrels and barbed wire. Forbidden areas are either dusty and inert, or have reverted to natural ecosystems.

Purpose and Context: Established in 1964 and extended in 1974 after the short-lived Greek coup d'état and subsequent Turkish invasion of the North. There are about 8 legal border crossing points. Asylum seekers arrive in the North from Turkey and cross the Zone in remote areas to reach the EU. Cyprus has the largest per capita percentage of asylum seekers in Europe. The new barrier disrupts farmers' access to their fields and villages.



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Spain—Morocco Border Barrier

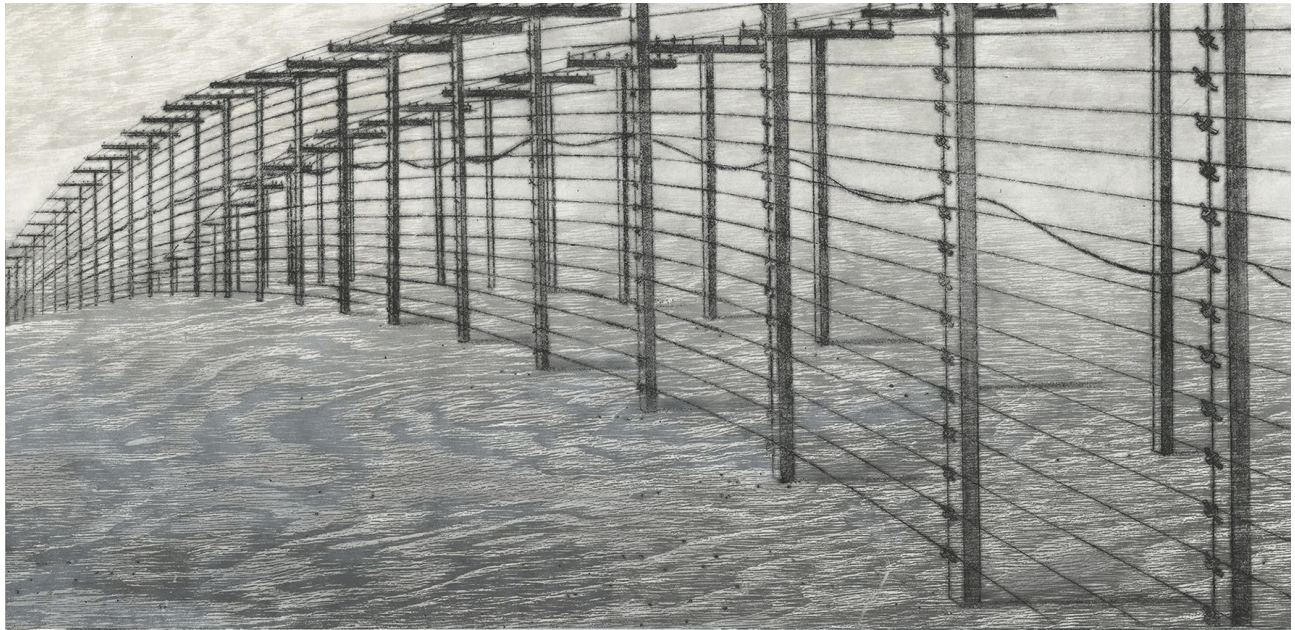
Length of Barrier: 8 km / 5 mi. (Ceuta) and 11 km / 6.8 mi. (Melilla). **Length of Border:** 8 km / 5 mi. and 11 km / 6.8 mi.

Built by: Spain, EU. **Phases:** 1993, first fence; 1995, second parallel fence; 2005, third parallel fence.

Location: Completely surrounding Ceuta and Melilla, two tiny Spanish territories about 400 km / 250 mi. apart, located on the Mediterranean coast of Africa, bordering Morocco.

Description: Parallel fences of increasing heights, 2.5 m / 8.2 ft., 3 m / 9.8 ft., 6 m / 20 ft., with barbed and concertina wire. Surveillance includes video cameras, microphones, infrared cameras, watch towers, military patrols, helicopter patrols. Ceuta and Melilla are included in Spain's Integrated System of External Surveillance (SIVE), which operates elaborate high-tech surveillance of Spain's maritime borders.

Purpose & Context: Anti-migration. Makeshift refugee camps near the border face violent harassment and raids from Moroccan security forces. Groups of migrants periodically storm the fences in large numbers to overwhelm Spanish patrols, in hopes that just one or two people might succeed in entering Ceuta or Melilla/the European Union.



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Uzbekistan—Afghanistan Border Barrier

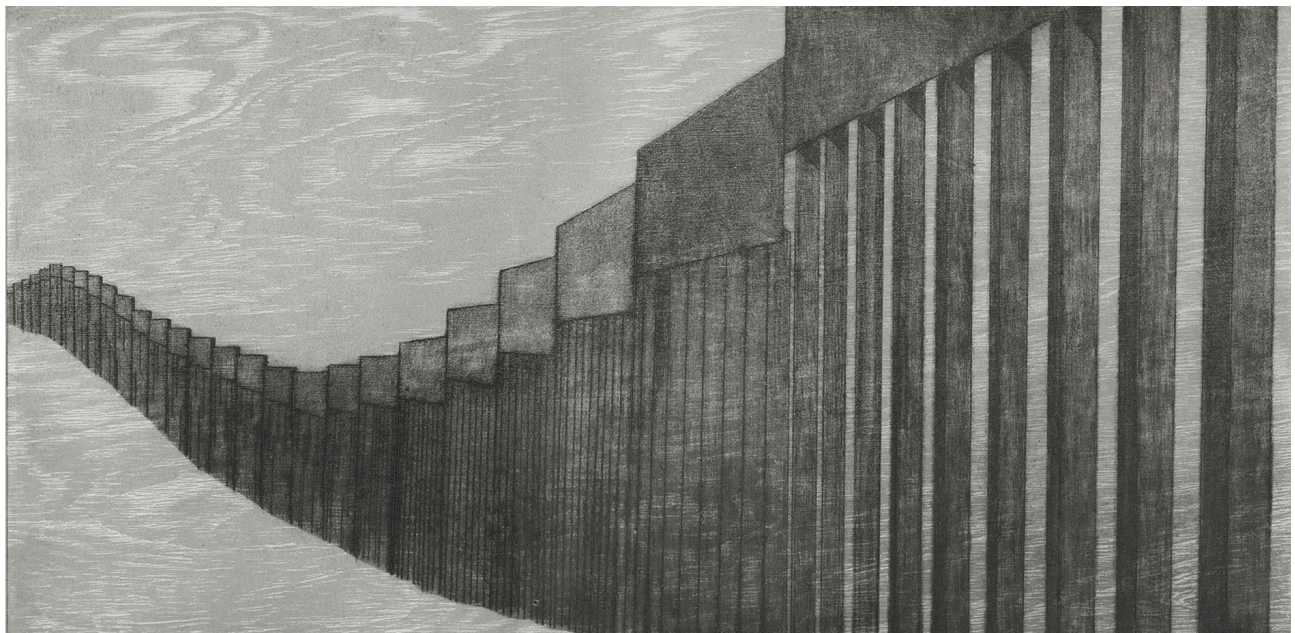
Length of Barrier: 144 km / 89 mi. **Length of Border:** 144 km / 89 mi.

Built: 2001. **Built by:** Uzbekistan.

Location: the length of the border, which follows the Amu River.

Description: Barbed wire fence and a second, taller, electrified barbed-wire fence, land mines, armed patrols. One of most heavily guarded border in the world.

Purpose and Context: Anti-migration. When the USA invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Uzbekistan immediately built the barrier to prevent Afghan refugees from crossing the border. Afghans could still visit legally on short-term tourist visas via a single crossing point, known as the Friendship Bridge. With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan 20 years later, in 2021, the Uzbek government closed the border completely. Due to international pressure, the government agreed to permit Afghans already in the country in August 2021 to apply to extend their visas. But no new visas are being issued. The country refuses to register any refugees.



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USA—Mexico Border Barrier

Length of Barrier: segments totaling 1126 km / 700 mi. **Length of Border:** 3145 km / 1954 mi.

Date Started: 1993. **Phases:** 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s. **Built by:** USA; in 2020s some funding from state of Texas and private funders.

Location: Approximately 1/3 of the border is barricaded, in the west, bordering California/Baja, Arizona/Sonora and New Mexico/Chihuahua to El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juarez, and parts in the East including Brownsville/Matamoros. Harsh terrain, treaty rights and private property thwart wall-building in most of Texas.

Description: Concrete-filled steel barricades topped with 1.5 m / 5 ft. anti-climb plates, totaling 5.5–8 m / 18–27 ft. and extending 2.4 m / 8 ft. underground. Many areas have second parallel fence. Long-distance cameras, motion sensors, flood lights, drones, helicopter and ground patrols. Older barriers: Surplus military helicopter landing pads, placed vertically. Low, anti-vehicle barriers in remote areas: crisscrossed welded segments of surplus railroad tracks. In 2023, Texas installed a 300 m / 1000 ft. floating buoy and blade barrier supporting a submerged mesh fence, at Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras.

Purpose and Context: Anti-migration. The expanding barrier, along with restrictive border policies, results in many people taking extreme, often lethal risks to cross through hostile desert terrain. In September, 2023, The UN's International Organization for Migration reported that the USA-Mexico border is the world's deadliest land route for migrants. Thousands of migrants remain camped or detained at the border in squalid conditions.



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Israel—West Bank, Palestine Barrier

Length of Barrier: 709 km / 440 mi. **Length of de facto Border:** 320 km / 199 mi.

Phases: 2003, 2004, 2006, 2012 and ongoing. **Built by:** Israel.

Location: The barrier roughly follows the internationally recognized borderline but is twice as long, extending as far as 20 km / 12 mi. into Palestinian territory, often encircling many of the more than 250 Israeli settlements which have been built in violation of international law.

Description: 42 km / 26 mi. of the barrier is concrete, standing 8 m / 26 ft., fortified with watchtowers. The remainder is a high-tech, multi-layered fence system of barbed wire, much of it electrified and surveilled, flanked on either side with additional fencing, ditches, and military access roads, averaging exclusion areas of 60 m / 200 ft.

Purpose and Context: Israel began building the barrier during the suicide bombings of the 2nd Intifada in the early 2000s with the stated aim of reducing militant access into Israel. However, the barrier also functions as a land grab, severing Palestinian farmers from their fields and olive groves and is just one part of a complex system restricting movement of Palestinians within the West Bank. Thousands of homes and olive trees have been destroyed on the pretext of building the barrier. In 2004, the UN International Court of Justice declared the barrier illegal under international law.