Roundtable II: Responses by Jared P. Van Ramshorst

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What are the intended/unintended consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies?

Anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies are intended to disrupt and deter cross-border smuggling and trafficking. While smuggling and trafficking practices differ in many regards, government policy rarely distinguishes between the two. In the U.S. and Mexico, such policies have taken a variety of forms and are increasingly directed toward restricting unauthorised migration from Central America.

For example, the U.S. has recently employed new surveillance technologies along the U.S.-Mexico border that make use of radar and infrared to detect unauthorised entry to the U.S. In Mexico, government officials have deployed hundreds of new immigration agents to its southern boundary with Guatemala alongside mobile checkpoints and inspection corridors. Ironically, these strategies have not only failed to eliminate smuggling and trafficking in North and Central America but have also contributed to their widespread and enduring use.

In particular, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies have complicated Central American migrants' efforts to reach the U.S. and Mexico. As migrants

attempt to escape from violence and brutality in their countries of origin, they must now confront a number of obstacles created through anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies, such as those listed above.

Accordingly, many turn to clandestine means of travel to circumvent these restrictions, often relying on smugglers to guide them past immigration checkpoints and areas of intense surveillance. Thus, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies have not only failed to deter smuggling and trafficking, but have made these practices increasingly necessary and widespread.

Are border fortifications a useful or counterproductive response to mass movements of people?

From fences along the U.S.-Mexico border to the wall that separates Israel and Palestine, border fortifications are a popular response to mass movements of people. Despite their prevalence in government policy and contemporary immigration debates, border fortifications are both ineffective and counterproductive.

For example, Operation Gatekeeper, a 1994 Clinton-era measure that vastly expanded border fortifications on the U.S.-Mexico boundary, did little to prevent or deter unauthorised migration to the U.S. Instead, the failed policy led to thousands of migrant deaths by shifting unauthorised entry to remote regions of the U.S.-Mexico border, such as the Sonoran Desert in Arizona and the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas.

Meanwhile, rates of unauthorised migration remained largely unchanged amidst a growing undocumented population in the U.S. The policy also led to an increasingly robust and organised industry of smuggling and trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border, which has succeeded in facilitating unauthorised migration, despite border fortifications, for the past three decades.

In the wake of Donald Trump's presidency and his promise to "build the wall", border fortifications have reemerged as a popular response to recent migration

streams. As past evidence indicates, further fortification of the U.S.-Mexico boundary will not only be ineffective but also counterproductive.

[→ Back to the virtual roundtable](#).