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# As American troops install razor wire in Arizona, images of the Berlin Wall resurface

*The construction of the Berlin Wall shook my family enough that we moved to America. Now, a similar wall is being constructed on our southern border.*

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My Arizona home is an hour's drive from the U.S.-Mexico border. Residents of border towns are not strangers to the concept of a border wall. But there's one recent thing that I wasn't quite prepared for: the sight of the U.S. military stringing razor wire across the existing border wall. As I watch the military personnel installing mile after mile of razor wire, I'm reminded of another wall, one that caused my own family grief and pain: the Berlin Wall.

In 1961, on what became known as "Barbed Wire Sunday," the East German military secretly unloaded tons of concrete, stone blocks and barbed wire in Berlin under the cover of darkness. Many Berliners awoke to find themselves trapped, separated overnight from families, friends and loved ones.

Television carried footage of panicked East Berliners who lived right on the border jumping out of apartment windows in attempts to reach the other side. My family was living in London at the time, and evidence of German bombing was still prevalent throughout the city. The shock of the sudden installation of the Berlin Wall, in part, caused my family's exodus to the United States when I was a small child. The visions of those trying to escape to freedom were close to home and not easily erased.

## **Border security doesn't need to be brutal**

Razor wire is a high-tech form of barbed wire. It has coiled metal strips with sharp edges that have one purpose: to prevent passage by humans by grabbing and ripping human flesh. The multiple blades of a razor wire fence are designed to inflict serious injury on anyone

attempting to climb through. It is often installed in prisons and psychiatric hospitals. It's a frightening sight.

There are those who would argue that refugees are indeed criminals if they attempt to enter a country illegally. Those who tried to escape East Berlin were undoubtedly violating East German law. But whether the appropriate penalty for those trying to leave East Berlin should have been serious injury or death seems questionable looking back.

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Column

I spent two years serving my country with AmeriCorps. In return, Uncle Sam sent me a bill.

After historic midterm election wins, Muslims struggle a little less with their American identity

In recent years, I've become familiar with the immigration debate. As an attorney, I've attended U.S. immigration court proceedings. I'm an immigrant myself, a naturalized U.S. citizen since 1982. My personal and educational background has equipped me to discuss positions and arguments both in support of and against immigration policies. In many places, particularly populated ones, a U.S.-Mexico border wall already exists, and has for years.

Some Americans contend that the installation of razor wire by the U.S. military is necessary to ensure the safety of our country. And while it is true that the protection of our citizens and the lawful security of our country is important, there are already provisions in place for border security, including parts of a wall that has already been built — the wall to which razor wire is now being added. In areas without walls or fences, the terrain is treacherous and the desert is unforgiving. To enter the United States through illegal means necessarily involves risk of death or arrest.

In 2015, the Hungarian government was struggling to deal with North African and Middle Eastern refugees at its borders. It placed a bid with a German company for 10,000 rolls of razor wire — the kind being installed by our troops on the U.S.-Mexico border. Despite the fact that the deal was worth hundreds of thousands of euros, the German manufacturer of the razor wire refused to sell it to the Hungarian government. The company's owner stated that razor wire was designed to prevent criminal acts, and that fleeing children and adults were not criminals.

Today, a museum exists at the spot in Berlin where so many lost their lives trying to seek freedom and liberty. Perhaps it is because the Germans understood the horrors of their own

wall that some of them decline to assist the Hungarians in replicating it.

Razor wire is the wrong message for the United States to be sending the world.

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