

# Biden administration's continuation of Trump border wall will destroy Friendship Park, a historical site

Max Jones  
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Despite having campaigned on the false promise not to build “one more inch of wall,” the Biden administration’s Homeland Security Secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, has recently announced dozens of border wall projects, including building additional walls along the southwest border of the United States. The move has blatantly exposed the Democrats’ support of barbaric border policies that are a continuation of Trump’s border wall.

Among the projects approved to continue, the construction of the border wall includes plans to construct two 30-foot walls across Friendship Park in San Diego which could begin in a few weeks, according to statements made to NBC News by Pedro Rios, director of the American Friends Service Committee. Friendship Park is a historical site in both the United States and Mexico that was constructed as a symbol of “binational unity.”

Ever since its creation, Friendship Park has been used as a location for workers and families on opposite sides of the border to see each other and spend time together, although its very creation was bound up with the increased crackdown on migrants and the building of a militarized border. Families who could once move across the border freely were now under increased border laws and regulation. In recent decades, the sharpening of contradictions between the nation-state and globalization has threatened and degraded even this function of the park. US imperialist wars abroad and the anti-immigrant policies accompanying them have been used to justify increased militarization of the US-Mexico border, which includes Friendship Park.

The demarcation of the border line at Friendship Park was arbitrary until 1994 when the Clinton

administration installed an iron mesh fence across San Diego County’s border with Mexico, as well as immigration courts, as part of “Operation Gatekeeper.” This barrier greatly changed the dynamics of Friendship Park, making anything other than very limited physical contact impossible, although oral and visual communication was still possible.

This policy was taken to a more extreme level when a system of double border walls was constructed through Friendship Park under the Obama administration between 2009 and 2011, after the federal government seized land from the State of California through eminent domain, according to the *People’s Tribune*. Due to design concessions in order to enable Friendship Park to still serve some of its function, visitors were still able to see each other through a system of gates during limited visiting hours dictated by border security.

The new plans unveiled by the Department of Homeland Security to continue Trump’s border wall in San Diego essentially render the park obsolete, since they do not include any gate or mechanism that would enable people to see each other across the border in Friendship Park, according to Assistant Chief of San Diego Border Patrol Alfonso Martinez and Imperial Beach Station Chief Justin De La Torre. John Fanestil, an advocate of the park, told KPBS, “This latest announcement really amounts to the complete desecration of this historic location.”

Pedro Rios, director of the American Friends Service Committee’s U.S./Mexico Border Program told the *San Diego Union Tribune*, “What was clear was there had been no contemplation about public access to the site. ... For us that meant the legacy of Friendship Park where families and visitors have gathered for decades

would essentially be terminated. It would be done with.”

Though well intentioned groups, such as the Friends of Friendship Park San Diego/Tijuana, are circulating petitions directed at Mayorkas to reconsider the wall expansions, the Democrats have long pursued, together with the Republicans, decades-long policies that brutalize and demonize migrants and asylum seekers.

The Obama administration deported more immigrants than any administration before or since, and Donald Trump continued these efforts, campaigning on xenophobic and reactionary measures against immigrants from what he referred to as “shit hole” countries. The Trump administration exploited the pandemic in order to pursue a more aggressive policy on immigration, taking advantage of Title 42, which eliminates the right for asylum seekers to due process, resulting in countless desperate immigrants being sent back to their home countries where many were fleeing from real dangers. Biden continued this policy with *Biden v. Texas*, with the case revealing that more than 100,000 immigrants encountered by the Department of Homeland Security at the southwest border last May were expelled with no due process under Title 42.

Construction of the border wall began under the Clinton administration and these efforts have been ramped up by every president since. Before these policies were enacted, immigrants could cross the border in some urban areas. Since this is no longer an option, now they are forced to travel in desolate areas with extreme environmental conditions, exponentially increasing the danger. The ruling class is aware of the deadly consequences posed, which manifest themselves in avoidable and deeply tragic events.

In April, a woman died attempting to cross the US-Mexico border near Douglas, Arizona. Her death was due to her attempt to climb over the border wall in Mexico with a ladder; on her way down her harness got tangled, resulting in her being stuck upside down until her death.

In a recent mass tragedy, more than 50 immigrants attempting to cross the border while avoiding border patrol died by suffocation in a truck trailer.

The renovation of the border and building of the wall by the Trump administration has created conditions increasing the chances for injuries and death, partly due

to the increased height of the border to 30 feet. According to a report published by the University of San Diego, the instances of patients arriving at the UC San Diego Medical Center’s trauma ward due to people falling off the border structure has increased five fold since 2019.

The Mediterranean is the most dangerous place for immigrants in the world, with a shocking 3,231 immigrants dead or missing at sea last year alone, according to the UNHCR. Such senseless deaths are due to brutal policies of militarized borders, a phenomenon seen the world over.



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