U.S. statecraft and the U.S.–Mexico border as security/economy nexus

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Abstract

Border scholars have on the whole rejected the claim that the U.S.–Mexico border has been dissolved by late modern crossborder migrations of capital, people, and practices. However, in noting the escalation of militarized policing practices in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands in the midst of liberalizing trade agreements such as NAFTA, the tendency in this literature has been to reconcile hegemonic U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practices in the region as paired. In conversation with these approaches to U.S. statecraft in the region, I propose that border policing in the wake of September 11, 2001, surfaces the long-standing relative incoherence of U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice. By investigating how nonlocally conceived policies come apart on the ground in terms of the local circumstances each produce, I describe the border as a security/economy nexus in U.S. statecraft.

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Turning to North America, we are faced with a more diffuse and insidious threat: the threat posed by our open borders with our friends to the north and south.

Francis X. Taylor, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State (U.S. House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, 2001: 9)

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As former Governor of a border state, President Bush has seen that the free exchange of goods and services sparks economic growth, opportunity, and dynamism, fresh ideas, and democratic values, both at home and abroad. We must build a new consensus, to promote open markets and trade for decades to come.

Robert B. Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative (U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, 2001: 9)

**Introduction: the paradox of “gated globalism”**

The U.S.–Mexico border is said to be a heterotopic zone of cultural, economic, and political spatialities neither properly Mexican nor American (Gómez-Peña, 2001; Morales, 1996). From this perspective, the border is a pseudo-country of its own (Amexica, Mexamerica) or a border-straddling region rather than a line dividing two countries (for example, see Gibbs, 2001). Such arguments reiterate what has been said about state borders more generally in late modernity: that statist either/or spheres of authority have been regionalized in the form of multi-centric “sovereignty-free” actors and spatialities (Rosenau, 1997). Still, U.S.–Mexico border scholars are reluctant to argue that the border is collapsing, and on the whole prefer to treat it as an ambiguous “trickster figure” (Price, 2003). For example, if the border is crisscrossed by maquila-based flows of goods and capital, then at the same time it marks adjacent regimes of accumulation set firmly apart by wage, environmental, and labor regulations (Peña, 1997; Sklair, 1993). Similarly, if the border has been reterritorialized by crossborder webs of informal income-generating activities (Staudt, 2001) and migratory networks that constitute important new transnational political communities (Rouse, 1991; Smith, R., 2003), then it is at once a strict iconographic geography policed by unofficial, private paramilitaries whose vaguely legal “statecraft from below” (Doty, 2001) repeats the formal inside/outside logic of ongoing, official immigration- and narcotics-related statecraft in the region (Dunn, 1997; Palafox, 1996). So, while postnational political ecologies may in part define the U.S.–Mexico border region, the border itself still figures importantly in a traditional either/or sense. As Cunningham (2001: 382) argues, the border is an instance of a late modern “gated globalism” – a “shifting political terrain that retains elements of an older sovereignty and yet reveals evidence of a new, perhaps still inchoate, transnational state sovereignty” (see also Hackenberg & Alvarez, 2001).

Efforts to theorize the U.S.–Mexico border in these paradoxical terms (see, for example, Andreas & Snyder, 2000; Blatter, 2001; Kearney, 1998; Lowenthal & Burgess, 1993; Pellerin, 1999; Sadowski-Smith, 2002) cannot be reviewed here in any detail. Instead, I will narrow my focus to two important and groundbreaking analyses by Andreas (2000) and Nevins (2002). Starting from the assumption that relations in the border region are characterized by a mix of interdependence and assymetricality (see also Herzog, 1990; Martinez, 1994), with the U.S. the dominant partner that defines in large part the terms of collaboration and integration (see also Castañeda, 2003), Andreas and Nevins tackle the problem of how U.S. statecraft...
simultaneously nationalizes and internationalizes the gated-yet-global border with Mexico. Andreas provides a sociological analysis of law enforcement, and proposes that the U.S.–Mexico border is a stage and that border policing is an audience-directed performance. The latter, for Andreas, is less about the “instrumental goal of law enforcement” and more about the “expressive role of law enforcement” (Andreas, 2000: 11), with the symbolic functionality of policing connected to the project of making a porous trade border in the region. For Andreas, the performance of the border as a blockade ensures that the larger process of economic integration will not be derailed by domestic and bilateral politicking over drug trafficking and migration issues: “Part of the political project of turning the border into a more expansive economic bridge has also involved making it at least appear to be a more formidable police barrier” (2000: 141; emphasis added).

Although not denying the symbolic importance of U.S. geopolitical practice in the border region, Nevins (2002) suggests that border policing cannot be condensed to a media event. Rather, Nevins counsels that as a real-world militarized practice responsible for large numbers of migrant deaths (see also Eschbach, Hagan, Rodriguez, Hernández-Léon, & Bailey, 1999), border policing tends to complement the neoliberalization of the border in that it concerns a xenophobic and hypernationalist instatement of borderland law and order against flows of migrants unleashed by the liberalization of rural and urban Mexico. In this sense, Nevins names the U.S. a “gatekeeper state” which manages the migratory fallout of U.S.-led Mexican market restructuring. The gatekeeper state, Nevins argues, provides “extraterritorial opportunities for national territory-based capital (thus intensifying the process of globalization) while, somewhat paradoxically, providing security against the perceived social costs unleashed by globalization” (2002: 178).

Both Andreas and Nevins caution against a theorization of U.S. statecraft as a coherent phenomenon. However, the tendency in both projects is, generally, to look for the points of coincidence between U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice in the border region. This tendency is front and center in Andreas’ analysis, in which border policing is presented more or less functionally in terms of a larger U.S. project of continental neoliberalization. For example, Andreas seems to suggest that U.S. geopolitical practice (i.e. customs and immigration policing) exists as a second-order theatrical foil to U.S. geoeconomic interests (i.e. free trade), such that “real” U.S. trade interests are strategically accompanied by parallel security “images”. In contrast, the incoherences of U.S. policy in the borderlands – specifically, the struggle between the U.S. free trade and border policing agendas, in both local and national contexts – are stated much more forcefully in Nevins’ work which is concerned to highlight how “different boundary regulatory regimes relate to the [contradictory] security and opportunity components of the modern territorial state” (2002: 178). This said, in his specific empirical discussion of U.S. border policing in the mid- to late-1990s, Nevins’ argument tends to reconcile U.S. geopolitical practice in the borderlands with U.S. geoeconomic interests. For Nevins, the U.S.-led NAFTAization of the border region and U.S. border policing go hand in hand as far as both are corresponding disciplinary practices, the former focused on markets and the latter focused on bodies disenfranchized by economic
restructuring. Importantly, Nevins does not suggest that this coincidence is intended, but rather that economic liberalization has compelled the militarization of the U.S. Southwest border as migrants are pushed northwards. In this sense, Nevins considers the patterned meeting of U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic policies in the region rather than their intended coherences.

Despite this significant difference between the two authors, it is important that in both analyses we are presented with an account of U.S. borderland geopolitics and geoeconomics as matching imperatives. I want to explore U.S. policies in the borderlands from a slightly different vantage point. My point is not that performance is irrelevant when considering U.S. geopolitical practice in the border region. For example, Andreas provides a compelling case that border policing plays a key symbolic role in the constitution of identity (see also Calavita, 1996), much as critical international relations scholars have argued that the citational performance of selves and others can be said to permeate statecraft in general (Ashley, 1987; Connolly, 1991; Weber, 1998). My point is also not to marginalize U.S. geoeconomic goals in the region. For example, Nevins reminds us that the coding of U.S. immigration policy in the language of threat evidences an aphasia about the larger political economic structures – connected directly to the U.S.-led restructuring of neighboring emerging markets – that fuel undocumented migration to the U.S. (see also Shapiro, 1997). Nevins’ analysis also usefully provokes the student of U.S.–Mexico relations to consider border policing as a state-based enactment of competence in the midst of migratory flows that are often presented as a challenge to sovereign state legitimacy (see also Dalby, 1996; Ellis & Wright, 1998) despite the fact that they are initiated in statecraft. The difficulty, however, particularly in the context of contemporary geopolitical events which have elicited very different representations of the U.S.–Mexico border by U.S. officials (see the opening citations from the Department of State and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative), is that an analytical reconciliation of U.S. trade and security policies in the borderlands – whether in terms of intended policies or the patterned outcomes of policies – risks overstating the relative unity of U.S. statecraft. So, in an effort to expand the scholarship initiated in particular by Nevins (2000, 2002) on the contradictory components of U.S. policy in the borderlands with Mexico, I want to consider how U.S. statecraft might be composed of the “collision of mutually opposed tactics” (Jessop, 1990: 234) rather than of paired policies.

I hope to forward two major claims in this article. On the one hand, my goal is to suggest that U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice in the borderlands is – in significant part – the product of nonlocal executive and congressional articulations that view the U.S.–Mexico border from afar as an instrumental and malleable landscape where the “national interest” is both evident and pursuable. Here, the border is visualized in terms of larger geopolitical and geoeconomic drives concerning, respectively, security and trade (Gottmann, 1973). The importance of nonlocal representations of the border is most apparent in the case of U.S. immigration and anti-crime legislation. While contributing to the localized militarization of the border in the 1990s, this legislation was the product of a wide range of anxieties – related to counterterrorism and national security (see
below) – not directly raised by border residents (Gimpel & Edwards, 1999). In this sense, alongside its local production, we might note that the border is represented and shaped nonlocally as a geographical site relevant to a wide range of policies of both geopolitical and geoeconomic constitution, which often invoke some overarching notion of American identity (Mains, 2002). This is not to displace local practices constitutive of the border (Kirby, 1993) or the localization of state projects according to specific conditions (Hagan & Gonzalez Baker, 1993; Heyman, 2001). Rather, it is to agree with Ortiz-González (2004) who remarks that despite the multiplicity of localized practices constitutive of border life, the U.S. Southwest borderland is wrought in important ways by distant and disconnected policymakers (and I would add lawmakers) for whom the region is a vacant, abstracted, and unpopulated frontier of geopolitical and/or geoeconomic significance.

On the other hand, I hope to suggest that in terms of the everyday functioning of the border, a central dilemma inhabits U.S. statecraft which calls into question the simple instrumentality of this landscape as well as the very notion of a coherent U.S. “national interest” (Trubowitz, 1998). Focusing on the local collisions of projects conceived nonlocally, I suggest a constitutive tension between a rebordering national security territoriality and a debordering geography of participation in open markets and trade networks. Taking this tension seriously means thinking through the dilemma that – in U.S. statecraft – the Southwest border is a security/economy nexus of relatively incoherent practices buoyed by a range of sometimes countervailing policy identities. My point is that U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice, rather than the coherent product of a properly sovereign center of policy power capable of balancing and managing diverse security and trade agendas, is a field or network of policy designs whose exercise over space is far from orderly.

To understand the border as a security/economy nexus is to borrow insights from geographers concerned with the problem of geographical scale. Although the literature on scale is far from settled (Brenner, 2001; Marston, 2000; Marston & Smith, 2001), there is general agreement on the need to rethink “Westphalian notions of geographical scale as a fixed, bounded, self-enclosed and pre-given container” (Brenner, 2001: 592; Brenner, Jessop, Jones, & MacLeod, 2003). Two important points follow from this consideration of scale as a challenge to the “territorial trap” (Agniew, 1994). First, the critical scale literature encourages a decentering – but not dismissal – of state power (Hyndman, 2004) by looking for the production of geopolitical and geoeconomic projects in a multiplicity of policy contexts not readily associated with the field of Foreign Policy proper (Campbell, 1992). For instance, much of the discussion in this paper about U.S. geopolitical policy in the border region looks to congressional lawmaking attentive to a wide range of policy concerns ranging from terrorism to social services fraud, narcotics trafficking, and cultural change. Hence, “jumping scales” to look at congressional law as an important source of geopolitical practice in the border region entails calling into question the typical distinction between foreign and public policy in favor of a much broader field of policy debate relevant to geopolitical statecraft. Second, following the general emphasis in the scale literature on the socio-political production of scale rather than on the neat scalar delineation of socio-political
contest (Brenner, 1998; Swyngedouw, 1997), we can consider the ways in which the late modern re-scaling or re-spatialization of state governance (Mountz, 2004) is about how struggle over the spatiality of geopolitical and geoeconomic projects plays out incoherently in terms of the professed goals of statecraft. For example, I argue in this article that understanding the U.S.–Mexico border as an instance of “gated globalism” entails looking at the different ways in which it is geo-graphed (Ó Tuathail, 1996) – or represented and practiced – in the midst of bouts of political contest which invoke it as relevant to some issue. The important question here is how such geo-graphs work themselves out in a practical sense on the ground.

The article proceeds as follows. In two initial sections, attention is given to a condensed discussion of U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice in the border region. The bulk of these two sections describes the growth of U.S. immigration reform legislation since the mid-1980s and the attendant militarization of the border, with the aim of sketching the development of a U.S. geopolitical frontier regime in the region. However, I also consider the neoliberal re-regulation of goods, services, and investment flows across the U.S.–Mexico border since the 1982 peso crisis in order to point out that the Southwest border is also differently represented and practiced in U.S. statecraft. A subsequent section focuses on the intersection of U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice in the borderlands in the wake of September 11, 2001, suggesting that the events of the day in question do not mark a watershed but merely surface two countervailing trends already anchored in U.S. border policy. I also contemplate here recent policy attempts to reconcile borderland trade and security imperatives through a technologized border landscape. A fourth and last section suggests some avenues for thinking of the border as a security/economy nexus.

A geopolitical frontier regime: immigration law in the U.S. Southwest

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Customs Service have a prominent policing mandate along the U.S. Southwest border with Mexico.¹ This mandate has been driven in important respects by congressional lawmakers attentive to the border as a porous site of geopolitical significance. Representing the U.S. Southwest border region as an unruly landscape of uncontrolled migration, a cumulative series of immigration laws passed by Congress since the mid-1980s have shaped immigration (in)admissibility procedures at the border as well as border policing technologies and techniques. Together these laws – straddling concerns typically understood as distinct to realms of public and foreign policy (Tichenor,

¹ Since September 11, 2001, the INS and U.S. Customs have been shuffled out of the Departments of Justice and Treasury, respectively, and now comprise the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE) of the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. Because much of this paper deals with events prior to this reorganization, I will refer predominantly to the INS and U.S. Customs rather than the newly formed BICE.
2002), and more generally indicative of the “securitization” of migration issues after the Cold War (Bigo, 2002; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002) – contribute to a geopolitical “frontier regime” (Anderson, 2000), or institutional framework, in which border controls are embedded. These laws are discussed below, with the aim of demonstrating the continuity – rather than discontinuity – of post-September 11 immigration legislation implicating the border region.

Although military exercises have long defined the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, the 1986 Immigration and Reform Control Act (IRCA) (Pub. L. 99-603) – following 15 years of heated congressional debate (Schuck, 1992) – inaugurated a late-20th C. militarization of the border. Motivated by congressional fears of demographically driven migration through the U.S.–Mexico “backdoor” (U.S. Select Commission on Population, 1978), and by the purported medical risks, contagion possibilities, so-called cultural enclavism, and fiscal burdens posed by such migration (U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 1986; U.S. Subcommittee on Economic Resources, 1986), IRCA sought to close the border to undocumented migration and eradicate the underground worker economy. IRCA legislated an employer sanctions program and an amnesty program, and increased monies for detention facilities, ground and aerial surveillance hardware, fencing, roads, and border policing practices under the joint control of the Departments of Justice, Treasury, and Defense (Roberts & Yale-Loehr, 1987). Perhaps most noteworthy about IRCA-era policing was the erosion of the posse comitatus statute which restricts the role of military groups in domestic policing. By 1989, for example, the U.S. Department of Defense, under INS jurisdiction, was awarded direct surveillance, inspection, pursuit, and all-important construction duties in the U.S. Southwest including the erection of security fences and border lighting (Dunn, 1997).

In the wake of IRCA, concern with immigrant criminality emerged forcefully in Congress to dominate immigration lawmaking. The most important category to materialize during this period was the “criminal alien”. Cited as a threat to public safety and mobility, as well as a drain on sparse criminal justice resources, the “criminal alien” was statutorily identified as an incarcerated alien subject to deportation. However, in the context of congressional fixation on the U.S. Southwest border as a porous site overrun by once-deported criminals (U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law, 1989; U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1993), the category was generalized to name a larger perceived problem of immigrant criminality. The Clinton administration and the bipartisan U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform corroborated this focus in reports which argued that a top border enforcement priority should be the cessation of in progress “criminal alien” activity in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands and in major urban centers throughout the U.S. (Office of the President, 1994; U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1994).

Two major immigration laws marked this period. The first, the 1990 Immigration Act (IMMMACT) (Pub. L. 101-649), was publicly celebrated as an attempt to expand family reunification- and employment-based migration to the U.S. but was nonetheless consistent with IRCA’s enforcement efforts. The 1990 law legislated an increase in Border Patrol agents along the U.S.–Mexico border and reorganized
the overlapping inadmissibility grounds listed in the Immigration and Nationality Act into nine specific categories of deportable and excludable aliens including migrants with communicable diseases, drug addictions, mental or physical impairments, and those deemed likely to become public charges (Roberts, Yale-Loehr, Hake, & Osuna, 1991). Most significant were the aggravated felony criminal grounds for exclusion and deportation included in the law. Under the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act (Pub. L. 101-649), an aggravated felony included murder, drug and firearms trafficking, and conspiracy to commit these acts. The 1990 law expanded this group of crimes for exclusion and deportation purposes to include many crimes involving the use of physical force and punishable with five or more years of imprisonment. In tandem with the expansion of aggravated felony, the law sought to accelerate exclusion and deportation through curtailing migrants’ appeals during administrative and legal hearings. The law also awarded statutory arrest powers to the INS, which in turn promoted the agency’s involvement in a number of proactive, multi-jurisdictional task forces concerned with borderland organized crime and gang violence.

The second major immigration law of the period – the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (VCCLEA) (Pub. L. 103-322) – resulted from congressional attention to narcotics trafficking and drug use, with lawmakers focused specifically on polydrug contraband corridors in the U.S. Southwest (U.S. House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, 1991a, 1991b). That a domestic crime bill contained significant immigration provisions resulted from congressional belief that “out-of-control” borders facilitated narcotics trafficking, drug use, and subsequently, violent crime by juveniles, the working poor, and the unemployed in America’s inner cities (U.S. House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, 1992; U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1992, 1993a). The 1994 crime bill provided funds for a “criminal alien” tracking center, legislated expedited removal procedures for nonlawful residents convicted of aggravated felonies, and expanded aggravated felony for immigration inadmissibility purposes to include obstruction of justice, perjury, bribery, forgery, counterfeiting, and any offense committed by an alien already ordered deported. The law also authorized two-thirds of a billion dollars for border enforcement, primarily to expand experimental immigration policing operations already operative in El Paso which placed agents and vehicles on the border in 24 h “terrain denial” shifts (U.S. House Subcommittee on Information, Justice, Transportation and Agriculture, 1993; U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1993).

The 1993 World Trade Center bombing played a role in the development and passage of VCCLEA (U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1993b), but it was ironically after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that Congress would move more forcefully to tackle terrorism in terms of immigration law. Although the Oklahoma bombing in point of fact was not related to immigration (Coleman, 2004; Sparke, 1998a), the event seems to have prompted Congress to treat threats to national security as a specific instance of the political economy of immigration more generally (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Government Information, 1995). So, with opinion polls suggesting a popular incapacity to
distinguish between domestic and international terrorism (Dlin, 1998), with militia violence typified in Congress as an anomalous expression of political disaffection (U.S. House Subcommittee on Crime, 1995), and in the context of ongoing congressional disquiet with immigrant criminality (U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, 1995a; U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1995), the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) (Pub. L. 104-132) was born. AEDPA extended the changes to U.S. immigration law effected by the 1990 and 1994 laws. For example, AEDPA added gambling, managing prostitutes, alien smuggling, passport fraud, stolen vehicle trafficking, and, more generally, any crime with an imposed sentence of one or more years to the list of aggravated felonies warranting exclusion and deportation. Also added under the law were new procedures that limited legal petition and relief for aliens excluded or deported from the U.S. (Pistone, 1996).

Throughout the period leading to the passage of the counterterrorism bill, widespread political debate, marking IRCA’s 10 year anniversary, focused again on the economic impact of migration to the U.S. Scrutiny of immigration in economic terms occurred at both local levels – for instance, in the form of California’s Proposition 187 which sought to deprive undocumented workers of social services and education (Ono and Sloop, 2002) – and at the national scale, where lawmakers argued vocally that undocumented migration across the U.S.–Mexico border threatened the viability of federal and state welfare programs as well as employment opportunities for American citizens (U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, 1995b; U.S. House Subcommittee on International Law, Immigration, and Refugees, 1994; U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1996). The resulting 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) (Pub. L. 104-208) would rewrite AEDPA only months after its passage. IIRIRA enlarged the scope of the aggravated felony charge for immigration inadmissibility purposes, making the definition one of the most amended sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act. To the already lengthy list of aggravated felonies IIRIRA added all crimes of violence – misdemeanors included – with an imposed sentence of one or more years, as well as new money laundering and tax evasion crimes (Osuna, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). IIRIRA also eliminated AEDPA’s separate deportation and exclusion procedures and replaced them with a streamlined removal process in which all undocumented aliens – either at the border or in the interior – were subject to summary removal by INS officers without petition. This aspect of the 1996 law effectively removed aggravated felony and non-criminal removal cases (i.e. document fraud or misrepresentation) from legal wrangling in the courts, and made removal an extra-constitutional matter of procedure (Joaquin, 1996; Taylor, 1997; Wettstein, 1996). The complementary border enforcement measures introduced by the law funded a radical expansion of the “terrain denial” operations feted under VCCLEA. For example, the law mandated: 5000 new Border Patrol agents; $12 million for a 14 mile triple layer fence in the San Diego–Tijuana region; monies for INS aircraft, four wheel drive vehicles, and night vision equipment; biometric border crossing cards for Mexican nationals; and, a border entry–exit database. IIRIRA resulted in an $800 million Southwest border budget for the INS.
in 1997 (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1998) – up 25% from the previous year – as well as a 60% increase in the number of formal alien removals between 1996 and 1998, affecting for the most part Mexican nationals in the U.S. Southwest (INS, 2002: 190–197).

In this longer term legislative context, post-September 11 national security laws implicating borderland immigration are less exceptional than often assumed. Although described as bold new pieces of legislation that authorize “new weapons for us to fight the war at the borders and here at home” (Ashcroft, 2002), the 2001 U.S.A. P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Act (Pub. L. 107-56) and the 2002 Enhanced Border Security and Visa Reform Act (Pub. L. 107-173) restate much of the immigration measures and procedures listed above. For instance, although the laws award the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security vast new powers of alien arrest and detention without disclosure, they showcase AEDPA and IIRIRA powers of expedited alien removal which are not novel (although the increased frequency of their application does differentiate the post-September 11 period; see U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2004). In this sense, the 2001 and 2002 laws follow closely the now established congressional practice of limiting “constitutionally committed power” over immigration (Foster, 1997; Jones, 1997) and asserting the plenary – or absolute – authority of legislative and executive branches of government in immigration matters (Holland, 2000). The two new laws further showcase border enforcement solutions already legislated by IIRIRA, including: the creation of a centralized border database of all entering and exiting non-citizens; the implementation of a foreign student address tracking system; and, the institutionalization of machine-readable biometric border identification cards. And perhaps most notably, the post-September 11 laws follow from those above in that they sanction a blending of non-military and military operations in a hybrid mode of low-intensity conflict border policing shared between the Departments of Defense, Justice, and Homeland Security (see Bigo, 2001 on the merging of “external” and “internal” security after the Cold War). In sum, the P.A.T.R.I.O.T. Act and the Enhanced Border Security Act – built on already well-established grounds for immigration inadmissibility and previously legislated policing solutions – are part of a long-standing geopolitical frontier regime rooted in congressional immigration law reform efforts.

Debordering: offshore production and market access

The development of a geopolitical frontier regime focused on immigration policing represents only one element – albeit dominant – of U.S. statecraft in the U.S.–Mexico border region, which has also been concerned with the geoeconomic goal of turning the border into a binational laissez-faire free trade territoriality (Sparke, 1998b) with limited restrictions on the flow of capital and goods. This second trend in U.S. statecraft is well illustrated by the development of the border region maquiladoras, summarized below. My central aim in this quick section is to underscore the key role played by U.S. policy in the development of the export
processing-based borderland economy, rather than attribute its growth to some vague notion of inexorable globalization. Here I am loosely following Dicken (2003) by understanding the borderland geo-economy as built from processes of economic integration and dispersion mediated by statecraft.

In-bond assembly plants for goods imported from – and exported back to – the U.S. were started by Mexico in 1965 with the Border Industrialization Program, designed to reduce border unemployment through export-oriented industrialization in the northern states (Bustamante, 1983). It was in the 1980s, however, that Mexico’s border region export industry exploded. This was due to Mexican financial upheaval and changing U.S. production strategizing. On the one hand, governed by post-1982 IMF and World Bank structural adjustment austerity, and under pressure from the U.S. to liberalize trade and open its markets, the Mexican government expanded the maquila zone beyond the border and placed increased significance on industrial exports to increase foreign exchange earnings (Arregui, 1993; Wilson, 1992). On the other hand, facing international competition in manufactured goods, U.S.-based firms – actively encouraged by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Commerce (U.S. House Committee on Government Operations, 1987) – looked for opportunities to transfer assembly operations offshore to Mexican greenfield sites (Moody, 1995) with a comparative advantage in low-cost – mostly female (Fernández-Kelly, 1983) – labor. The result was the rapid expansion of the original 1965 assembly program.

In the mid-1980s, capital-intensive original equipment manufacturing plants appeared south of the border. This trend towards maquila-based manufacturing continued with the passage of NAFTA, which phased out many of the remaining tariff restrictions on goods produced in Mexico. In the wake of the 1994 trade agreement, second generation maquila plants (renamed export manufacturing industries or EMIs) incorporated advanced manufacturing technologies as well as just-in-time (JIT) inventory methods and market supply schedules (Gerber & Carrillo, 2002). More recently, a third generation of high-skill, R&D-based EMIs have materialized in Mexico (Carrillo & Hualde, 1998; Kopinak, 1997), focused for instance on microchip production. The substantial increase in crossborder traffic associated with this shift from basic assembly operations to JIT production has led some to argue that the pre-1950 period of rigid boundary demarcation has been transformed into a post-territorial regional geoeconomic order (Herzog, 1992) marked by EMI-based continental shipping corridors and crossborder banking networks.

This process of economic integration owes much to U.S. geoeconomic policy. In this sense, contra the assumption that economic globalization proceeds only insofar as states lose their capacity to regulate (Blouet, 2001), it is clear that U.S. legislative and executive branches since 1982 have actively engineered a liberal regulatory agenda vis-à-vis Mexico with distinct implications for the U.S.–Mexico border region. For example, following the 1982 debt crisis, the U.S. Treasury Department and Federal Reserve actively organized an IMF bailout for Mexico, leading the way for peso devaluation, Mexican public sector restructuring, and Mexican export sector resource allocation (Shepherd, 1994). The latter dovetailed neatly with
congressional and executive promotion of offshore assembly sites for U.S.-based firms seeking to compete with Japanese and European upstarts (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization, 1986). The crossborder production sharing regime – coded in the hegemon’s language of bringing democracy and development to Mexico (U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, 1999) – was secured under U.S. Tariff Code sections 806.30 and 807.00, which allowed U.S.-based firms to import their reworked manufactures tariff-free or with tariffs only on the added value to the reworked product. The creation of “foreign trade zones” on the U.S. side of the border – customs-exempt industrial parks and distribution centers adjacent to U.S. ports of entry – complemented this arrangement by allowing U.S.-based firms to store, re-manufacture, and if necessary re-export goods to Mexican maquiladoras for further assembly work. When offshore Mexican manufacturing exceeded these exemptions, U.S.-based firms imported goods through the Generalized System of Preferences which gave substantial tariff breaks to developing country manufacturing exports to the U.S. (Kopinak, 1993). As more production took place in Mexico for U.S.-based (and other) firms, greater opportunities opened for U.S. foreign direct investment. Again, U.S. executive and legislative powers were involved. The market neoliberalization legislated by NAFTA (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000), for example, resulted in a flurry of U.S. investment in low-wage, high-technology maquila sites, suggesting that NAFTA was as much about a new “geography of money” as it was about trade per se (Christopherson & Hovey, 1996; Frieden, 1997; Morales, 1997). By the end of the millennium, annual U.S. foreign direct investment in the Mexican maquiladora sector totaled more than $2.5 billion (Gerber, 2001), resulting in yearly maquiladora exports to NAFTA partners of more than $50 billion (Mexican Investment Board, 1999).

It should be underlined that there is much more to U.S. geoeconomic policy in the borderlands than the institutionalization of a porous border to suit offshore manufacturing. The negotiation of NAFTA, for example, was also about market access for a bundle of U.S. goods and services exports not immediately related to the maquiladoras. Indeed, since the 1994 trade deal, Mexico – one of several key “big emerging markets” for U.S.-based firms (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993) – became America’s second largest trading partner in overall goods and services. On the one hand, the size, depth, diversity, and proximity of the Mexican market translates into competitive opportunities for U.S. goods exports such as inter-modal transportation equipment, oil and gas field technologies, telecommunications, and mining equipment (U.S. Department of Commerce Commercial Service, 2002). On the other hand, Mexico is touted as the major market for U.S. services (i.e. investment, banking, insurance, on-line retail), absorbing over $12 billion dollars of U.S. services exports annually. Accordingly, current U.S. trade policy is increasingly preoccupied with negotiated services re-regulation in Mexico – and in Latin America as a whole – in an effort to offset the U.S. merchandise deficit with the rest of the world (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on International Trade, 1999). Recently awarded “fast track” trade promotion authority (by the same Congress that authorized the biggest U.S.–Mexico border militarization in U.S. history), the current administration is targeting the hemispheric liberalization of services in a proposed 2005 Free
Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) (Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 2002; Zoellick, 2002).

All told, rather than the workings of some hazy process of globalization outside and beyond state regulation, the expansion of the maquiladora industry and the current emphasis on market access negotiations evidences the ongoing regulatory and reproductive role of the state (Brenner et al., 2003) in the expansion of border region economic integration. Importantly, this means that U.S. statecraft in the U.S.-Mexico border region is de facto constituted as much by geoeconomic debordering trends that facilitate the flow of goods, services, and investment as it is by rebordering policing practices rooted in immigration law reform. Indeed, porous hemispheric borders are central to post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy where geoeconomic concerns are at least on par with traditional geopolitical concerns (see statements in Office of the President of the United States, 2002a; U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, 1997; U.S. House Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade, 1998).

September 11, 2001, and smart borders

The geopolitical and geoeconomic components of U.S. statecraft in the U.S.–Mexico border region came to a head after September 11, 2001. Even while a good deal of congressional and executive attention focused on the northern border with Canada (U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims, 2003), thereby breaking with the almost exclusive security focus on the Southwest border in the 1990s, the customs and immigration procedures introduced after September 11, and later legislated in law, nonetheless translated into a considerable hardening of the U.S.–Mexico border which, like the northern border, was cast as a national security threat (Kourous, 2001; Torres, 2001). Cargo detection technologies, extensive immigration checks, intermittent border closures, and massive traffic searches – in which whole lanes of northbound crossborder traffic were pulled over and searched manually by National Guard troops, in search of stow-away terrorists, narcotics, undocumented migrants, and weapons of mass destruction – slowed traffic to a crawl at major Southwest border ports of entry.

These “code red” search authority procedures resulted in a 50% drop in undocumented and fraudulent immigration, as well as a marked reduction in illicit narcotics traffic in the border region (Butterfield, 2001; Serrano, 2001). But the intensified security procedures also predictably disrupted legitimate commercial traffic. For example, although U.S. surface trade with its NAFTA partners decreased by 1.5% between January and August 2001 due to the general U.S. economic slowdown and the relocation of maquiladora production overseas, the scrutiny of conveyances, cargo, and people contributed to a 11.6% reduction in crossborder trade between September and December 2001, resulting in the first overall decline in the value of goods shipped across U.S. borders to and from Mexico and Canada by truck, rail, and pipeline since the signing of NAFTA in 1994 (U.S. Department of
As such, if pre-September 11 traffic volume already threatened the viability of crossborder JIT schedules (U.S. GAO, 1999, 2000), then the post-September 11 national security border regime threatened to outright disable crossborder assembly, manufacturing, and shipping (particularly in autos and electronics; see Ellingwood, 2001; Jones, 2001; Oppel, 2001). As part of the late modern geopolitical frontier regime inaugurated with the passage of IRCA in 1986, then, contemporary border policing practices seem to have compromised the porous trade border sought in U.S. geoeconomic policy (Flynn, S., 2002).

This borderland dilemma has not escaped public scrutiny. During the three years since September 11, widespread attention has focused on the logic of U.S. trade and security mandates in America’s borderlands. For example, right wing anti-immigration groups such as the Washington-based Center for Immigration Studies (who have served on the bulk of post-9/11 congressional immigration-related hearings) have publicly warned that porous trade borders – rather than strong borders with strict entry and exit controls – invite future terrorist attacks (Camarota, 2002), and that the militarization of immigration and customs policing in the U.S. Southwest should be a central component of the “War on Terror” (Malkin, 2002). Trade advocates and representatives have taken a different tack, but have stressed a similarly fraught relationship between trade and security at the border. The Economist (2002), for example, claims that the volume of containerized trade traffic entering and exiting U.S. Southwest border ports of entry thwarts geopolitical attempts to police these flows. Similarly, the public/private pro-free trade Border Trade Alliance lobby points out that NAFTA trade relations are endangered by stepped-up post-September 11 border security, and that attention should be focused on the visa issuance process and not on border control per se (Border Trade Alliance, 2002). Both arguments are reiterated in a recent and well-publicized Council on Foreign Relations homeland security task force report (Hart, Rudman, & Flynn, 2002) which notes that truck, container, pipeline, and rail shipments into the U.S. need to be secured through an electronic pre-screening customs process so that aggressive border policing tactics will not hinder trade.

In response to this debate the Bush administration has articulated the merits of a technologized border. Thus while President Bush’s 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States trumpets both free trade enlargement and the “struggle against global terrorism” as twin, reconcilable pillars of U.S. millennial foreign policy, this is now to be done through the implementation of Smart Border negotiations with both

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Mexico and Canada. Smart Borders are described by the administration as technology-dependent border immigration and customs policing systems that keep “pace with expanding trade while protecting the United States and its territories from the threats of terrorist attack, illegal immigration, illegal drugs, and other contraband” (Office of the President of the United States, 2002b). The principal technologies in question include automated biometric recognition devices (i.e. ID cards with embedded fingerprints, facial scan equipment, and retinal and voice recognition equipment), non-invasive scanning technologies for commercial vehicles (i.e. gamma-ray detection equipment), electronic means for locking transit containers, and among other things, upgraded immigration databases to track individuals and collect data on border crossers (for a detailed review, see Ackleson, 2003).

The Smart Border solution has been actively embraced by America’s major trading partners. At the March 2002 U.N. Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, for instance, Mexican and U.S. cabinet members called for a number of technological fixes to immigration and customs policing, including: pre-clearance systems for travelers and commercial traffic; the electronic registration of third country nationals; the creation of a shared electronic customs biometric database; and, the joint development and use of high-technology surveillance and detection devices at and between border ports of entry. Thus, the Smart Borders initiative is doubly important in that it appears to herald an emergent post-September 11 bilateral mode of security cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico (as well as Canada) distinct from a previous period marked for the most part by U.S. disinterest in bilateral negotiation over immigration (for example, see Mohar & Alcaraz, 2000; on U.S. unilateralism in immigration matters, see Weintraub, 1997). Here, Mexico in particular appears to be moving from “reticent diplomacy” (Chabat, 1997; Dominguez, 1997) on the subject of immigration to a much more active role that – in tandem with support for the Smart Border initiative – includes support for the militarization of immigration policing along the border with Guatemala (Flynn, M., 2002) as well as support for increased cooperation between Mexican and U.S. police forces in the U.S.–Mexico border region (Paterson, 2001), in an attempt to win U.S. backing for a NAFTA-wide security perimeter.

Despite this turn to technology north and south of the border, recent GAO reports requested by congressional lawmakers suggest a large gulf between the theoretical and practical use of such technologies. On the one hand, the reports suggest that detection technologies such as scanners would likely result in a slowdown in commercial traffic, due to the large volume of containers, trucks, and railcars requiring inspection in order for the effort to be meaningful (U.S. GAO, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). On the other hand, the reports note that biometric surveillance at the border will likely congest traffic, since the technology is such that a considerable number of border crossers will fail primary inspection and be sent to more detailed secondary inspection sites (U.S. GAO, 2002d). In sum, it is not immediately evident that technology can resolve the tension between trade and security at the border.
Conclusion: the border as security/economy nexus

Post-September 11 border policing measures are certainly part and parcel of an intensified neoconservative unilateralism in U.S. foreign policy (Anderson, 2004), and indicate more generally the popular political currency of an either/or, self/other geopolitical narrative in the U.S. (Coleman, 2002; Hyndman, 2003). But the conflict between U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic goals sketched out above suggests that September 11 is not easily typified as a watershed event marking a succession of border regimes in the U.S. Southwest. In this sense, although border policing has certainly intensified in the region, I want to caution against reading the 2001 attacks in terms of the replacement of a permeable geoeconomic border with a newly hardened, either/or geopolitical border (cf. Ackleson, this issue). The events of September 2001 seem important not because they mark a transition from a predominantly trade-oriented to a predominantly security-oriented border regime but because they visibly and tangibly surface two countervailing trends in U.S. statecraft. More specifically, the meeting of U.S. trade and security policies in the borderlands in the wake of September 11 suggests that, shaped by dissimilar security and neoliberal designs, U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practices at once demand different things of the border, which rather than clearly serving either U.S. geopolitical or geoeconomic purposes, is a security/economy nexus. In this sense, to rework Nevins’ (2002) claims about U.S. border region policy in the 1990s in light of contemporary events, recent U.S. border policing practices appear to have surfaced a long-term latent tension between differently conceived U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practices whose threads meet in the borderlands to form a giant Gordian knot rather than a patterned weave (see Herod & Wright, 2002, and especially Sharp, Routledge, Philo, & Paddison, 2000, on the exercise of power in terms of its spatial “entanglements” and inconsistencies; see also Allen, 1997, on “lateral modes of power”).

Importantly, the border as security/economy nexus suggests a geography of statecraft in which geopolitical and geoeconomic power is not a singular, coherent capacity neatly “pooled up” at the center of the sovereign state (Agnew, 1999; Jessop, 1990; Murphy, 1996) and then deployed spatially, as if the state is a juridico-economic whole (Gordon, 1991) of symbiotic legal-military and market access projects with the border as its place of focus. Rather, as a Janus-faced geography (Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999), the border as security/economy nexus is literally a strategic terrain where countervailing projects of statecraft come to bear on one another. This brings us back to the problem of the nonlocal production of the border introduced at the outset of this essay. As designs conceived nonlocally in which the border figures from afar as an uncomplicated landscape amenable to either rebordering or debordering “national interests”, U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practices are much more complicated at the local scale where they come face-to-face with one another. From the remote perspective of U.S. congressional lawmakers and executive policymakers the border might appear to be a simple, instrumental frontier open to geopolitical and geoeconomic takeovers. However, these nonlocal territorial “intentionalities of control” (Yuval-Davis, 2003) come apart in terms of the local circumstances each produce. In this sense, U.S. geopolitics and geoconomics in the
border region, although clearly geographical in their respective colonizations of the border as a malleable frontier, are anti-geographical in that their instrumental mappings of territory obscure the complex place-based realities of their deployment (Dalby, 1998; Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). It follows that U.S. statecraft in the borderlands can be read as a fraught bundle of geopolitical and geoeconomic “storylines” rather than as a coherent sovereign “script” (Ó Tuathail, 2002).

But such storylines are about more than competing and countervailing practices in a narrow sense because statecraft is not simply about strategy. For instance, on a cultural register, statecraft is about how an imputed body politic comes to know and celebrate itself in relation to identifications of danger (for example, see Burke, 2002; Weldes, Laffey, Gusterson, & Duvall, 1999). If we note, then, that geopolitical and geoeconomic practices are not just organizational phenomena but also articulations of identity (Albert, Jacobsen, & Lapid, 2001; Paasi, 1996), to admit the convoluted character of U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice implicating the U.S.–Mexico border region is to call into question not just the concept of U.S. foreign policy as a coherent mode of government, but further the notion of a singular identity informing U.S. statecraft.

Recent work by Mead (2001) helps to unpack the multiple identities undergirding U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy in the U.S.–Mexico border region. For example, the geopolitical representation of the border as a geography in need of policing discloses a realist Jacksonian identity in U.S. statecraft. In this cultural mindset, the border marks a gap between an exceptional, popular domestic realm of citizenship and community, and an anarchic outside world of danger to be kept at bay through heavily militarized borders. This Jacksonian impulse understands its beleaguering “others” in the last instance to be neither accommodating nor redeemable. The result is a conviction that hostile “others” – a confused collection of undocumented migrants, narcotics traffickers, “criminal aliens”, and terrorists, defined in conflated foreign policy and public policy contexts – need to be fought off through sustained frontier warfare in the form of hard borders and tough immigration legislation.

However, in its geoeconomic treatment of the border, the Jacksonian commitment figures minimally. Rather, U.S. geoeconomic policy centers a meliorist identity rooted in a complex of Hamiltonian and Wilsonian commitments. From the Hamiltonian perspective, U.S. geoeconomic self-interest is best served by open markets and open borders. From the “civilizing” liberal internationalist Wilsonian vantage point, U.S. hegemony is guaranteed by the transformative global spread of the exceptional American republican experiment (Levin, 1968; Ninkovich, 1999; Perlmutter, 1997; Smith, N., 2003). The current retreat to either/or geopolitical identifications notwithstanding, this identity is crucial for the Bush administration, whose current trade mandate promises its Latin American neighbors democratic inclusion in an “expanding circle of development and opportunity” (Office of the President of the United States, 2002a: 21), and whose chief trade representative equates the spread of market economies with the end of terrorism (Zoellick, 2001). Quite against the Jacksonian impulse examined above, the U.S.-led geostrategic future imagined here is continental rather than bordered. However, it should be
noted that security too is lodged in this second identity. For example, market participation and democratic enlargement concern the replacement of politically uncertain places and peoples with political economic and cultural institutions compatible with U.S. trade and security interests (Pfaff, 2001; Smith, 1999; Steel, 1997). In other words, as with the Jacksonian trend, the Hamiltonian–Wilsonian complex explicitly references its “others”. But, where the “other” to the Jacksonian identity is dangerous and requires the exercise of direct bodily violence, that referenced in the Hamiltonian–Wilsonian complex is understood as underdeveloped, suffering from democratic deficit, and essentially malleable, and consequently is made subject to various ameliorative tactics. The point is that recognizing the U.S.–Mexico border as a security/economy nexus in U.S. statecraft means thinking not only about the countervailing nature of statecraft practices in and of themselves but more generously about how various competing identities constitute the disjunctive layers of U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic practice.

I have tried to present two basic arguments in this paper. First, that U.S. geopolitical and geoeconomic statecraft in the borderlands is at least in part rooted in nonlocal executive and congressional articulations that view the U.S.–Mexico border from afar as an instrumental and uncomplicated landscape. And second, that these nonlocal, instrumental representations and practices come apart on the ground at the border itself. I have described this dilemma as the local collisions of projects conceived nonlocally. From this follows the possibility that the U.S. Southwest border – in U.S. statecraft – is a security/economy nexus built from disjointed practices buoyed by a range of countervailing policy identities. Here I am interested to decenter but not write off state power altogether by taking seriously the re-spatialization of state governance in terms of its incoherences and countervailing imperatives. From this perspective, the task is not to look for the relative coherence of multiple practices of government or the singular identity constitutive of them, but the relative dissonance of such practices and the fractures constitutive of too-often-taken-for-granted state-based interests and identifications.

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