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As the United States' response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, begins to take its final shape, perhaps the most affected area of the country is the U.S. borderlands with Mexico. The optimistic talk of the 1990s regarding trade, investment, and economic integration in North America has given way to a rhetoric focused on security, particularly securing and controlling all points of entry to and exit from the United States. Cities and towns across the Southwestern border have experienced firsthand the consequences of the new, security-oriented national ethos and practices embodied in the Homeland Security Act of 2002. The comprehensive security strategy now in place permeates the three border wars examined in this insightful work--the war on drugs, the war over the enforcement of immigration laws, and the war on terror. As Payan demonstrates, the effects of these three wars have been significant. They include a loss of local autonomy and a disconnect between the priorities of Washington, D.C., and the local populations. Perhaps more important, they have created a rigid international line that represents a barrier to economic, social, and cultural integration--and a source of fear and suspicion between neighbors.

Payan traces the history of these policies on the border to discern and understand the evolutionary patterns and common threads that join all three policies together today. He argues that historically the border has experienced a gradual tightening and increasing militarization, culminating in today's restrictive environment. This book illuminates the ways in which border residents are coping with the stricter border security environment, and how they navigate their daily lives in the face of an increasing number of federal bureaucrats and programs designed to close the border. It examines the significant conflict between the government's efforts to close the border and the border communities' efforts to open it.