

Americans on the issue. President James Polk surely spoke for most Americans when he said that the concept of a balance of power "cannot be permitted to have any application to the North American continent, and especially to the United States. We must ever maintain the principle that the people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny."<sup>48</sup> Shortly after Polk spoke on December 2, 1845, Texas was incorporated into the United States, soon to be followed by the Oregon Territories, California, and the other land taken from Mexico in 1848.

The historian Frederick Merk succinctly summarizes American security policy in the nineteenth century when he writes, "The chief defense problem was the British, whose ambition seemed to be to hem the nation in. On the periphery of the United States, they were the dangerous potential aggressors. The best way to hold them off was to acquire the periphery. This was the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine in the age of Manifest Destiny."<sup>49</sup>

### THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE, 1900–1990

Offensive realism predicts that the United States will send its army across the Atlantic when there is a potential hegemon in Europe that the local great powers cannot contain by themselves. Otherwise, the United States will shy away from accepting a continental commitment. The movement of American forces into and out of Europe between 1900 and 1990 fits this general pattern of offshore balancing. A good way to grasp the broad outlines of American military policy toward Europe is to describe it during the late nineteenth century and in five distinct periods of the twentieth century.

The United States gave hardly any thought to sending an army to Europe between 1850 and 1900, in part because staying out of Europe's wars was deeply ingrained in the American psyche by 1850. Presidents George Washington and James Monroe, among others, had made sure of that.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the United States was concerned primarily with establishing hegemony in the Western Hemisphere during the second half

of the nineteenth century. But most important, the United States did not contemplate sending troops across the Atlantic because there was no potential hegemon in Europe at that time. Instead, there was a rough balance of power on the continent.<sup>51</sup> France, which made a run at hegemony between 1792 and 1815, was on the decline throughout the nineteenth century, while Germany, which would become a potential hegemon in the early twentieth century, was not powerful enough to overrun Europe before 1900. Even if there had been an aspiring European hegemon, however, the United States surely would have adopted a buck-passing strategy, hoping that the other great powers in Europe could contain the threat.

The first period in the twentieth century covers the time from 1900 to April 1917. It was apparent in the early years of the new century that Germany was not simply the most powerful state in Europe but was increasingly threatening to dominate the region.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Germany precipitated a number of serious diplomatic crises during that period, culminating in the outbreak of World War I on August 1, 1914. Nevertheless, no American troops were sent to Europe to thwart German aggression. The United States pursued a buck-passing strategy instead, relying on the Triple Entente—the United Kingdom, France, and Russia—to contain Germany.<sup>53</sup>

The second period runs from April 1917 until 1923; it covers American participation in World War I, which was the first time in its history that the United States sent troops to fight in Europe. The United States declared war against Germany on April 6, 1917, but was able to send only four divisions to France by the end of that year.<sup>54</sup> However, large numbers of American troops started arriving on the continent in early 1918, and by the time the war ended on November 11, 1918, there were about two million American soldiers stationed in Europe and more on their way. Indeed, General John Pershing, the head of the American Expeditionary Force, expected to have more than four million troops under his command by July 1919. Most of the troops sent to Europe were brought home soon after the war ended, although a small occupation force remained in Germany until January 1923.<sup>55</sup>

The United States entered World War I in good part because it thought that Germany was gaining the upper hand on the Triple Entente and was