

### Why did an arms race develop?

'During conflict your armaments help determine your influence; during war they help determine the outcome.'

While this statement is not necessarily true, it is often believed and therefore helps explain why an arms race occurred during the Cold War. It was to be driven by the national vulnerabilities of the superpowers and the political and personal insecurities of their leaders. In order to keep ahead of the opposition, each side decided to apply the possibilities of science to weaponry that would bolster their own prestige and reputation. Where the reality of weapon development lagged behind expectation the difference could be made up by public boasting of supposed capability. Such boasting, even when not believed, fed the insecurities of the other side to the point where a response that required an additional increase in arms became unavoidable. Thus the actions of both sides fed into an upward spiral of weapon development that constituted an arms race.

Arms races had developed before in history, for example in the years immediately preceding the First World War, but the arms race of the Cold War was different in terms of the destructive power that it was now possible to unleash. The purpose of weapons was usually to fight wars; nuclear weapons were developed to make the prospect of war so horrifying that war would be avoided. It was, therefore, an insurance against the actions of the enemy.

The great Prussian military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, writing in the nineteenth century, warned against unlimited violence. War is, according to Clausewitz, 'a continuation of political activity by other means'. Thus war should never be considered the goal in itself, merely one method that could be used if appropriate to achieve political goals. The destructive nature of nuclear weapons made it unlikely that political goals could be secured if they were actually used. As Eisenhower stated in 1954: 'What do you do with the world after you have won a victory in such a catastrophic nuclear war?' This statement explains why no superpower wanted to use nuclear weapons, but the threat of using them could be used to further political goals by putting pressure on their opponent.