

- *The growth of international tension.* The build-up of arms by both sides was a response to external factors: the growing hostility between the superpowers after 1945. As the Cold War developed, arms were viewed as necessary to safeguard the interests of East and West. What gave this particular arms race a unique feature was the development of the atomic bomb. The nuclear age increased greatly the destructive power of the weapons available and therefore increased the feeling of vulnerability of the side that failed to keep pace with the new technology. The USA had a monopoly in nuclear warfare from 1945 until the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb in 1949. Soviet secrecy, coupled with Stalin and Khrushchev's tactic of boasting about their nuclear capability, helped fuel American concerns that they needed to keep ahead of the USSR. The decision of the USA to develop the hydrogen bomb was prompted by the Soviet challenge over Berlin in 1948-49, the communist takeover of China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. This in turn led to a Soviet response to develop its own super bomb. Each power viewed the nuclear capacity of the other with anxiety and became convinced that their nuclear superiority was the only way of guaranteeing their defensive needs. It could also help when trying to gain concessions from your opponent during summits. The arms race became a substitute for war.

- *National and personal considerations.* Keeping ahead in the arms race became a matter of national pride. Both sides saw the competition that the arms race engendered as an opportunity to raise national prestige and secure their reputation in world affairs. This became increasingly important in the 1950s as each side tried to impress the so-called Third World with the supposed benefits of capitalism or communism. Technological achievement became a yardstick by which the relative merits of capitalism and communism could be measured. Coupled with the issue of national reputation was that of the standing of individual political leaders. This is probably best illustrated by Khrushchev, whose constant boasting was a reflection of his own personal insecurities in the position of Soviet leader. In April 1956, during a visit to London, Khrushchev informed the Prime Minister's wife that Soviet missiles could easily reach Britain. Most of Khrushchev's boasts were untrue but his need to strengthen his own position meant that he felt it necessary to develop nuclear weapon technology. He took a particular interest in the Soviet space programme.

American leaders were more susceptible to the pressures of democracy and these often pushed presidents towards increasing arms. At the beginning of Eisenhower's presidency a fear that a 'bomber gap' had developed between the USA and the USSR led to an increase in American defence spending on nuclear arms. Even when the photographs taken by U-2 spy planes revealed that the USSR had no such lead over the USA in nuclear weapons, Eisenhower found it difficult to

reduce spending due to continuing public fears of the possibility of Soviet superiority. In 1961 Kennedy's youth and inexperience as US president made him feel vulnerable to Soviet manipulation and as a result he felt it necessary to increase military spending. By 1962 military expenditure reached \$50 billion for the first time since the Korean War.