

The failure to rethink Soviet doctrine thus had two major consequences. It contributed to the Brezhnev regime's inertia and lack of political imagination, and in this way was one of the factors that led to the repetition of many of Khrushchev's mistakes. In addition, this doctrinal orthodoxy reinforced the perception in the West that fundamental changes had still not occurred in the Kremlin's thinking. Brezhnev did little to alter the widespread view that the West continued to face a determined adversary which might vary its tactics but still adhered to the time-honored strategy of relentless struggle against capitalism.

Brezhnev's close association with the Soviet military buildup and with the use of Soviet and Cuban military forces in the Third World diminished his credibility in the West as a spokesman for detente. His ill health during his last years in office and his conservative temperament precluded any dramatic moves to improve the Soviet image. The adjustments in the Soviet Union's pronouncements on nuclear war had little effect on Western perceptions of the Soviet Union. By 1981, when Brezhnev made his speech to the Twenty-Sixth Party Congress, his declining health caused him to be viewed as a lame duck, and Western policy-makers were awaiting the dawning of the post-Brezhnev era.