

would quickly find a common language. But isn't a nuclear catastrophe a more real danger than a landing by unknown beings from another planet? Isn't there a great ecological threat? Don't all countries have a common interest in finding a sensible and fair approach to the problems of the developing states and peoples?⁹⁰

Gorbachev's speech was also pervaded with a heightened sense of urgency about the consequences of nuclear war. His treatment of this matter contrasted quite noticeably with the comparative complacency that characterized Brezhnev's speeches to previous Party Congresses. In discussing the potential consequences of nuclear war, Gorbachev made his most concrete revision of past orthodoxy.

The assumption that the general direction of history is predetermined constitutes one of the cornerstones of Marxism-Leninism. The development of economic forces and the operation of the dialectic supposedly guarantee that socialism will inevitably supplant capitalism throughout the world. Just as feudalism was inexorably eliminated by the spread of capitalism, so too, according to official doctrine, is capitalism destined to be superseded by socialism.

The emergence of nuclear weapons, with their potential to destroy all civilized life on the planet, clearly poses a challenge to this deterministic view of history. If a nuclear holocaust can annihilate the socialist states along with the capitalist nations of the world, does this not invalidate the premise of history's inexorable march toward a socialist world? For this reason, authoritative Soviet spokesmen have been hesitant to admit that the socialist system might well vanish together with capitalism in the event of a nuclear war.

Back in March 1954, in an incautious moment, the head of the Soviet government, Georgi Malenkov observed that war between imperialism and socialism "given modern methods of warfare, means the destruction of world civilization."⁹¹ His rivals within the

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹¹ *Pravda*, 13 March 1954, cited in Joseph L. Noguee and Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II*, New York: Pergamon, 1984, 2nd ed., p. 110.