

# Cold War Images and The Enemies of Star Trek

by  
Aaron Angel ([ala6102@gemini.tntech.edu](mailto:ala6102@gemini.tntech.edu))

HTML version by [Luca Sambucci](#)

The Cold War was the longest length of time in the modern history when two nations were at war without engaging in direct battle. The literature and popular culture of this period reflect the uncertainty of the times and give imagery of the enemy in a way that can frighten and entertain. This work is devoted to proving the correlation between American stereotypes held of the Soviet and Chinese Communists and the enemies of one of the first science-fiction television shows, Star Trek. The Soviets were represented by the Klingon Empire and the Chinese by the Romulan Empire.

The Cold War began with the birth of Communism and was strengthened by the Red Scare of the 1920s. The Second World War, with the Soviet-Nazi Pact of 1939, showed the American people the basic nature of Joseph Stalin. The Tehran Summit of 1943 was the beginning of an era of distrust and an attitude of anti-Communism that has had repercussions to the present and may continue to cause problems for years to come.[1] After the War, a national feeling of distrust for anything Communist led to the second Red Scare and the age of McCarthyism.

Many Americans during the Cold War Era saw the Soviets, often known simply as "the Russians," as a major threat to the "American way". They saw a Communist threat to the government, a threat that was just being made known to them, a subversion of the people by the "Godless Communists." The common person was now on alert to his neighbors, each of which could be a commie.

During this trying time of McCarthyism and fear of Communism, religion was an important part of the everyday life of many Americans. Many believed that the Soviets' rejection of religion was a true signal of their barbarism and evil nature. This only helped to build a feeling of intolerance and fear in the hearts of Americans for the Soviets.

While it was known that the Soviets had practiced Christianity in the past, the Chinese idea of religion was different from anything most Americans had ever seen. They had no solid idea of a supreme deity and were therefore placed in the framework of atheists. This did not cause as much of a problem for the Americans, as the Soviets were the most obvious threat while the Chinese played a smaller role in the Cold War Era.

Another reason for the Cold War was the presence of Soviet troops in European countries, encouraging the spread of Communism and enforcing that ideology with weapons, as they did in the Hungarian uprising of 1956.[2] This show of brutal force did little to ease tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and did much to irritate the problems more.

To understand how Star Trek ties into the imagery of the Cold War and the politics of the time, one must know a little about the powers of the genre and their place in the fiction of the era. These powers include the United Federation of Planets (also simply called The Federation), the Romulan Star Empire, and the Klingon Empire.

The United Federation of Planets, the largest known galactic government, includes Earth, Vulcan and many other worlds as members. Its headquarters are in San Francisco on Earth, placed there due to Earth's initiation of the idea. The Federation is a democratic/representative type of government similar in structure to the United Nations. Each member of the Federation sends a delegate to the Federation council and each has an active voice

in the proceedings. Bordered by the Romulan Star Empire, the Klingon Empire and enclosed within the Ferengi Sphere of Influence (their trading area), the Federation area of space covers a large portion of the galactic arm.

The Federation Council is the legislative and judicial branch of the Federation government. Each planet represented here is considered an equal member as any other, though there are some offices and committees that have permanent members and chairs. Each planetary delegate is entitled to one vote per issue, no matter the size of the planet or the amount of influence it wields in the Federation.

Starfleet, the military and exploratory arm of the Federation, is a military type of organization, though not purely military in structure. They have an academy on Earth, and encourage the use of peace as a way of meeting new races and exploring the universe. Starfleet has a large following among the explorers of the Federation, in that Starfleet has discovered many of the homeworlds of the members of the Federation and has brought peace to much of the galaxy.

Mostly, the allies of the Federation are members of the organization, although some consider themselves neutral in standing. These members are most often on the fringes of the Federation and have ties to either the Klingon or Romulan governments as well.

Currently, the Federation is at peace with the Klingons and gives them aid as needed since the explosion of the moon of Praxis is still causing problems in the area of food growth and economic stability.[3] The Romulans are quiet, although on the rise in activity. The peace treaty made with them is still in effect, and war has not been called, but they make Starfleet nervous with their ventures into Federation space.

The Romulan Star Empire lies between the Klingon Empire and the United Federation of Planets. This position is a tenuous one, and has caused much hardship on the people of the Empire in the times that the Klingons and the Federation were at war.

The governmental structure of the Romulan Star Empire is a tri-cameral system, with nearly equal power divided among the following branches: the Praetorite, the Senate, and the Tal Shi'ar. Each of these has a specific duty in the Empire and each serves as a check and balance on the others to insure that no one else has more power than the others think they should have. This setup is similar to the Chinese form of government, insuring that no one office or person becomes too powerful and upsets the delicate balance of power.

The hereditary Praetorite is the judicial branch of the Empire. They write and enforce the laws and control the Star Navy, the military arm of the Empire. While the office is lifelong, people have been removed from office for non compliance with the Empire and other various crimes. Such people usually do not live very long after removal from office, if at all. The Senate is in charge of legislating the laws of the Empire and making sure that the people pay their taxes. This office is also hereditary and carries a lifelong term. These offices correlate to the lifelong offices of the Chinese government, though they are not generally hereditary.

The Tal Shi'ar, the intelligence gathering arm of the Empire, is a very thorough organization, considered the best in the galaxy. They are ruthless in their loyalty to the Empire and have ways of finding out information that would impress most of the known galactic governments. This branch of government is generally given free rein in their work, as the citizens of the Empire do not wish to be arrested for trumped up charges of treason for their interference. Similarly, the Chinese intelligence corps is known for its torture methods and is a feared tormentor.

The Romulan Star Empire is an aggressive enemy of the United Federation of Planets. Their first contact was when a Starfleet exploration vessel entered their system, setting off a perimeter alarm of satellites.[4] This frightened the peoples of the twin planets, evoking memories of the pirates that had originally caused them to break away from their mother-world of Vulcan. This ship named the planets Romulus and Remus, after the two Roman children raised by wolves.[5]

The second encounter was no better, and by that time the Romulans had re-established space travel, and launched a full-scale attack on the invaders. This led to an all-out war. The Romulans soon discovered the technology of warp drives from destroyed Starfleet ships and adapting that technology for their own ships.

This war ended when the United Federation of Planets took the advice of the Vulcan Ambassador, Sarek, to end the war and "close the door on them", meaning for the Federation to leave them alone and ignore them.[6] The treaty to end the war was the only one in Federation history to be completed solely by data transmission, and the Federation never got a glimpse of a live Romulan, only dead and vacuum-damaged ones. This peace treaty, named The Treaty of Alpha Trianguli,[7] established the Romulan Neutral Zone, and has remained intact since the signing. While there were breaches in the Zone, none of them were sufficient to lead to a war between the Romulan Star Empire and the United Federation of Planets.

Currently, Ambassador Spock is addressing a movement in the Empire to return to the Vulcan philosophy and way of life. This movement was set back by a Senator Pardek and his actions with the Praetorite, but continues to be an underground revolution. While the initial response to this is unclear, the Federation hopes to contact this movement again in the future.[8]

In the past seventy years, the Romulan Empire and the Klingon Empire have had two major wars, with the Klingons winning the first.[9] This war led to the development of an economic dependence on the Klingons for weapons and ships and led to an economic depression in the Romulan Empire. This action led to a very strong dislike for Klingons and their goods, since it is commonly said that the lowest bidder gets the market in Klingon arms deals.[10] Whether this idea is true is up to the reader, but evidence proves that Klingon weapons and ships are prone to disaster.

This war between the Klingons and Romulans closely resembles the problems between the Soviets and the Chinese following the death of Stalin. By 1963, the two countries were exchanging insults across their shared border and engaging in competition for Communist leadership on the planet. This split replaced the original Soviet face for Communism and added the Chinese ideology.[11]

The second war between the Romulans and the Klingons ended in the Romulan's favor, ending the economic dependence on Klingon technology and leading to a seventy-year isolationist period where the Empire tried to recuperate from the losses entailed during the two wars. Currently the two Empires are at an uneasy peace, as the Klingons are now an ally of the Federation, due to the destruction of Praxis's moon and the peace treaty of Khitomer that followed.[12] The Romulan Empire and the Federation are also at an uneasy period of peace, although it is unknown how long this truce will last.

The Klingon Empire, with its long tradition of warfare, has traditionally resolved its problems in battle and dealt with all their enemies in the same way: submit or perish. This policy was adapted against the United Federation of Planets but was unable to resolve in the way the Klingons had expected. A delegation of one person was sent to the Klingon homeworld in an effort to spread peace between the two governments, but this ended in failure when the Ambassador was removed from office while in transit and was told to return to Earth. This was before the first of the Federation Babel Conferences. [13] Later, the Klingon Empire and the Federation would establish a border and a 'neutral zone' of sorts so that each side could develop and grow in size.

The government of the Empire is based on a High Council, which rules with an iron fist. This council is in charge of all aspects of the government, including the military and the Imperial Intelligence. The council members are headed by the Emperor, though his position is more honorary than most believe. The members of the council are elected from the most prominent families in the Empire, and the term is lifelong.

The Imperial Intelligence branch of the Empire is in charge of gathering intelligence for the Empire and assuring that each member remains loyal. Each ship has a central room aboard that is the center for the I.I. Agent aboard, where all conversations and actions monitored and recorded for later review. If an action or

conversation appears to be against the Empire or detrimental in any way, that person is reprimanded and does not become a repeat offender under threat of death. This extreme amount of surveillance was also true in the Soviet Union, with the KGB monitoring every action made anywhere, even in its own offices. The KGB, easily identified with the Imperial Intelligence of the Klingon Empire, had hidden and secret agents in every branch of the Soviet government and on every ship, plane, or space capsule operated by Soviet personnel.

The history and culture of the Empire consist of resolving problems through combat, it is no surprise that the military arm of the government is given as large a portion of the moneys as they are. The traditional way to advance in rank is to kill your most immediate superior and keep from being killed in the process.

The Klingon Empire and the Soviet Union are similar in governmental structure and military nature. Both governments are based on a hierarchical system that keeps the strongest person, whether his strength comes from political cunning or actual physical might, at the top of the government and in charge of the government. This person had to remain strong, as fools and weak leaders do not last long.[14] This strong-leader type of system is readily apparent in the Soviet Union, especially during the years that Stalin was in charge. The founder of the Klingon Empire's warrior society, Kahless, was responsible for bringing the Klingon culture together.[15] He and Stalin can be seen as mirror images of each other, as both were ruthless and Stalin, to be sure, used cruel tactics to insure his rise in power within the Communist Party,[16] tactics that can be seen as the norm for the Klingon Empire.

During the Cold War, much of the moneys of the Soviet Union went into the military, in areas of weapons development and production,[17] as well as the keeping of a large standing army for use in its outlying provinces and areas of control in the Eastern Bloc countries as necessary. This compares to the Klingon Empire, with its militaristic society and desire or need to show great amounts of militaristic strength. Both governments were drained of economic resources during the drawn-out war / non-war, as can be seen by the current Russian economic situation and as shown in the sixth Star Trek film, in which the Klingon Empire has to ask for help from the Federation due to an explosion of a weapons plant on the moon of Praxis.[18] This is an obvious parallel to the meltdown of the Chernobyl nuclear facility in 1986.

The episodes of the classic Star Trek series sometimes mirrored the actions and events of our own world. Each episode that had either the Klingons or Romulans in it led to a conflict, much like any real-world meeting with either the Chinese or the Soviets. A few of these correlations are blatant, while the majority are more subtle in scope. nuclear devices in the two countries.

Another correlation is the episode entitled "A Private Little War," in which the Klingons have given weapons technology to one faction on a planet and Starfleet upgrades the other faction to keep both sides at a status quo, where they had been for years.[19] This type of cultural contamination relates to various places on the globe where the Soviets attempted to aid governments in their attempts to become Communist nations.

While there are a few direct correlations of Cold War actions, there is one episode that directly mocks the Cold War itself, "The Omega Glory." This episode takes place on a world that parallels Earth with its imagery and ideals, most especially the United States. There are references to Comms and Yanks and the Enterprise crew realizes that a world war that did not happen here happened there, with dire consequences. This war, avoided on Earth, used biological means to destroy the enemy, nearly destroying all human life on the planet in the process.[20]

The Chinese, like their science-fiction counter parts the Romulans, are seen as a secretive and xenophobic people, strange in their ways and non welcoming to outsiders.[21] The Romulans base their actions on a system of honor unique to the Eastern world. They, both the Romulans and the Chinese, also see themselves as superior to all other cultures, seeing these other cultures as barbaric and unworthy of more than the merest of response. These similarities make the ties between the two cultures, one real and one fictitious, easily seen.

Our first view of the Romulan culture, while limited, was in the classic episode *The Enterprise Incident*. They were shown to be in possession of a new type of technology, a cloaking device that hid their ships from detection. This showed them to be an unknown factor in the galactic political structure and a worthy enemy for Star Fleet.[22] This new enemy, while rarely seen, proved to be a worthy addition to the genre of Star Trek.

The Sino-Soviet Alliance of 1949, which allied the Soviets and the Chinese in defense against Japan and any of her allies [23] can be compared to the alliance between the Romulans and the Klingons. Both the Klingons and the Soviets extended military aid the other power (the Romulans and the Chinese) which was to be repaid in full, and both treaties were ended prematurely, the Sino-Soviet treaty with the death of Stalin on 1953 and the Klingon-Romulan treaty in a war.[24] The first showing of the Klingon-Romulan military pact was in the episode *The Enterprise Incident*, which showed a Klingon ship manned by a Romulan crew. Each treaty also bound the weaker government to the stronger in an unwanted and, at times, uncomfortable way. The Sino-Soviet pact was structured so that China had to pay for all aid received and this led to a distaste for Soviet-style Communism, especially after the de-Stalinization of the Soviet society and a perceived weakness to the West.[25] Later, after Stalin's death, the Chinese and the Soviets became bitter enemies, each fighting to become the world leader in the Communist sphere, much like the Klingons and Romulans after the cessation of the treaty became enemies and had little official contact.

The Klingon-Romulan treaty forced the Romulans to buy Klingon ships and equipment, or face the possibility of war. This treaty, backed by the military strength of the Klingon Empire, forced the Romulans to buy Klingon military goods and ships, and forced the Romulans to give the Klingons the cloaking device. While Klingon goods were powerful in battle, they had a tendency to be shoddy, as well as expensive to buy and maintain. This economic strain on the Romulan Empire caused hard feelings to develop between two already strained governments.[26]

The Chinese and the Romulans have secrecy and xenophobia in common, as well as a nonequal alliance with an ally that becomes a hated enemy. Each rises above unfair treatment to become a powerful opponent to their enemies. This is normal for oppressed people, and holds true for societies as well.

In conclusion, Star Trek enemies and the actual enemies of the Cold War era share many similarities. The Klingons, antagonistic and warlike, truly portray the American image of the Soviet Union. The parallel is strongly reinforced by the continual threat they, the Klingons, were to the Federation. The recurring encroachment into Federation territory and their multiple attempts to undermine the lifestyles of Federation planets solidly parallels the Soviet attempts to replace capitalism in small countries around the globe.

While the parallelism between the Romulans and the Chinese is not as strong as the Klingon-Soviet correlation, each is seen as 'the other enemy'. They are not as continual or dangerous a threat as the major foe, but they are still a force with which to be reckoned.

The Star Trek series parallels aspects of the Cold War in a manner that not only educates its viewers but shows a certain humor about the era. Star Trek also helped the children and adults of the late 1960s, and beyond, understand the Cold War by bringing it into a format devoted to entertainment and education, television.

---

## Bibliography

### Books

Duane, Diane. *\*My Enemy, My Ally\**. New York: Pocket Books, 1984.

Duane, Diane. *\*The Romulan Way\**. New York: Pocket Books, 1987.

Ford, John M. *\*The Final Reflection\**. Boston: Gregg Press, 1985.

Goulding, Jay. *\*Empire, Aliens, and Conquest : a critique of American ideology in Star Trek and other science fiction adventures\**. Toronto: Sisyphus Press, 1985.

Inglis, Fred. *\*The Cruel Peace: Everyday Life and the Cold War\**. New York: BasicBooks, c1991.

Okuda, Michael and Denise Okuda. *\*Star Trek Chronology: The History of the Future\**. New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

Morton, W. Scott. *\*China: Its History and Culture\**. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1980.

Naylor, Thomas H. *\*The Cold War Legacy\**. Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1991.

Schulster, Hal and Wendy Rathbone. *\*Trek: The Unauthorized A-Z\**. New York, New York: HarperPrism, 1994.

Rogin, Michael Paul. *\*"Ronald Reagan", The Movie and other episodes in political demonology\**. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1987.

Whitfield, Stephen E. *\*The Culture of the Cold War\**. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, c1991.

Whitfield, Stephen E. *\*The Making of Star Trek (by [Stephen Whitfield (and) Gene Roddenberry]\**. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.