Course Description
This course will examine the history of the twentieth-century international competition and conflict known as the “Cold War.” It will begin by tracing the roots of American-Soviet ideological antagonism back to the late nineteenth century, when many Americans became interested in the liberation of the tsarist empire and sympathized with a revolutionary movement they hoped would bring a "free Russia." The class will then look in depth at American responses to the Russian revolutions of 1917, including the controversial U.S. intervention in the Russian Civil War and the refusal to recognize the Soviet government until 1933 -- a period some historians have called “the first Cold War.” After briefly considering whether the U.S.-Soviet collaboration during the Second World War could have provided a foundation for postwar cooperation, the course will explore in detail how a conflict between the two superpowers widened into a global struggle between capitalist and socialist camps. Finally, the class will analyze how, after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, superpower relations shifted back and forth between detente and confrontation until the Cold War finally ended in the late 1980s. The primary objective of the course is to encourage critical thinking about different interpretations of the Cold War.