The Cold War looms over the history of the twentieth century. At once a geopolitical struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union and an ideological struggle between liberal democracy and communism, the Cold War transformed (and often deformed) national and international politics. Within the United States, the war touched every aspect of society, from the White House to suburban living rooms. Internationally, the Cold War was intertwined with decolonization and the collapse of empires. So all-encompassing was this conflict that its end in 1991 led some observers to predict “the end of history.” To study a conflict so vast is to confront a series of puzzles. What caused the Cold War? Why did it last so long? And why, having lasted so long, did it end so suddenly? Behind these questions lay issues fundamental to the study of history, such as the tension between structure and human agency; the interplay of material and ideological forces; and the relationship between the local and the global. This seminar will thus use the Cold War to introduce students to the discipline of history. It is designed to help students research and write their own work of historical interpretation, based on primary sources. We will explore the rich archival resources available at the Seeley G. Mudd Library, which include the papers of some of the Cold War’s most important figures. But we will also consider how to write about the social and cultural aspects of the Cold War. Potential topics for final papers include the Korean and Vietnam Wars; human rights; refugees and immigrants; McCarthyism; nuclear warfare; and the space race.