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Bush grasps to define enemy

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Chicago Sun-Times**March 16, 2002 Saturday****SECTION:** EDITORIAL; Pg. 19**LENGTH:** 564 words**HEADLINE:** Bush grasps to define enemy**BYLINE:** William G. **Moseley****HIGHLIGHT:**

Simplistic targeting of 'terrorists' endangers legitimate freedom fighters

BODY:

The Bush administration's conceptualization of the war on terrorism is markedly reminiscent of the Cold War mentality. While the current anti-terrorism campaign lacks an easily identifiable political state as the adversary, it is in rhetorical terms, similarly cast in terms of a battle between good and evil.

In a similar fashion, President Bush's "axis of evil" holds the simplistic allure of Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire." Despite the tribal appeal of viewing the outside world in terms of us vs. them, this crude, black or white, foreign policy prism is destined to run amok in a modern era characterized by shades of gray.

We need a solid set of principles--not polarized rhetoric--if we are to distinguish between true terrorist organizations and rebel movements and states legitimately fighting for democratic reform and self-representation. Let's not forget that the fight for independence in our own country at the end of the 18th century might have been described as a terrorist movement by the British.

Fortunately for us, our French allies saw it differently.

By many accounts, the Cold War was an American success as evidenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the collateral damage of this 40-some-years long war was significant. This was especially true in a number of marginal, "Third World" countries where the Americans and the Soviets funded insurgents and counter-insurgents during a prolonged, global chess match.

In Africa, where I work as an academic researcher, fairly complicated local conflicts were often viewed by the United States in terms of a global, Cold War paradigm. This led the United States, in the name of anti-communism, to financially and militarily back a number of unsavory political leaders and guerrilla insurgents, from Mobutu Sese Seko in the former Zaire, to UNITA rebels in Angola. Seko, perhaps one of the most corrupt of African dictators, plundered his country for more than 20 years during the Cold War with the full support of the United States. In Angola, the United States and then white-ruled South Africa sustained a bloody civil war by supporting UNITA rebels in the late 1980s.

America risks repeating the errors of the Cold War era by simplistically viewing the world in terms of terrorists or non-terrorists. The world stage is littered with rebel movements, some legitimately fighting for democratic reform and self-representation, and others seeking to impose minority views that run counter to the defense of basic human rights. Under the overarching umbrella of the war on terrorism, many a repressive leader may try to convince the United States that legitimate opposition leaders are terrorists.

Something less than a considered response on the part of the United States may lead to military maneuvers that result in a less troublesome world in the short term, but a far more volatile one over the long run.

While inherently messy, and certainly not as easy to communicate to the American public, we need a foreign policy that supports those entities working for democratic representation and basic human rights. It is the absence of these principles in many countries that has led marginalized peoples to join extremist movements that sometimes support the use of terror.

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