

ABROAD AT HOME

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Bargain NYT With ¹²/₁₁ Terror? ⁵⁷

Last Sunday a bomb planted by the Irish Republican Army blew up a community hall in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. Eleven people were killed and more than 60 injured.

Imagine that a day or two later the United States had urged the British Government and its Northern Ireland officials to sit down and negotiate with the terrorists who planned the bombing. Imagine President Reagan telling Prime Minister Thatcher that the I.R.A. had undeniable strength on the ground and that it was necessary to talk with them about a political solution.

Imaginable? Of course not. The notion would outrage just about everyone, in the U.S. or Britain or Ireland.

But a significant lobby in Washington is pressing the Reagan Administration to follow exactly that course with another country: Mozambique. The lobby wants the Administration to urge the Government of Mozambique to sit down with Renamo, a rebel force whose atrocities make the I.R.A. look like pikers.

Renamo killed more than 200 civilians Oct. 29 in an attack on a road convoy near the town of Tanginga. The attackers set buses crowded with passengers on fire.

The Tanginga attack was the latest in a series of civilian massacres by Renamo. The worst was in July in the village of Homoine, where some 400 civilians were murdered. Women and children who were patients in a hospital were killed in their beds.

Even the hard men of the I.R.A. were embarrassed by the carnage in Enniskillen last Sunday; a spokesman expressed "regret," for what that is worth. No words of regret have come from the shadowy forces of Renamo.

Occasionally a Renamo spokesman has tried to explain away atrocities. In one recent incident attackers cut off children's arms and legs with machetes. Renamo explained that the children had been caught in a military crossfire. The Renamo attackers must

have been using rocket-launched machetes.

That any American should favor political negotiation with such a group seems incredible. But Renamo has the strong support of the Heritage Foundation and other right-wing groups. Jesse Helms and other senators on the radical right have pressed President Reagan for political gestures toward Renamo. At one point Senator Robert Dole did so, to his shame and — one guesses — his belated embarrassment.

Just last week an American lobbyist for Renamo joined a conservative delegation that met with Frank Carlucci, President Reagan's national security adviser. It was a ploy to claim some kind of recognition. Mr. Carlucci was furious.

Renamo is a military fact on the ground in Mozambique. It has ravaged the country. But it has no clear political objectives or structure. It was created originally by the white minority regime in Rhodesia, to harass the blacks. Now its main support comes from the military in South Africa, which supplies the terrorists by ship and air drops.

South Africa is the key to the future in desperate Mozambique. Part of the South African Government plainly wants to stop helping Renamo and establish a working relationship with the Mozambican Government. Indeed, South Africa is helping to rebuild the port of Maputo and the rail line to it. But the military command in Pretoria keeps on helping to destroy as others build.

The irony of South African military support for Renamo is that it makes Mozambique more dependent on the Soviet Union, its only major source of arms. The Mozambican Government is Marxist by declaration, but it has been trying to move toward the West — notably so under its new President, Joaquim Chissano.

President Chissano has started to relax internal controls, in particular to end repression of religion. A Mozambican delegation attended the recent Commonwealth conference as guests, and Britain and other Commonwealth members pledged aid. The conservative Chancellor Kohl of West Germany is to visit the country soon. And Mozambique has for several months been carrying on talks with South African officials.

The Reagan Administration's policy is to support the Chissano Government and encourage those trends, at the same time urging restraint on South Africa. That is the policy that the right-wing lobbyists want to change. They want negotiation with Renamo and then, as soon as possible, American support for Renamo.

If the dead were Irish, I think those lobbyists would not dare speak as they do. But Mozambique is a far-off country, and the victims are black. We know less and we care less, most of us. But surely there is a limit of decency in dealing with murderers anywhere. □

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