

Kevin Lowther and C. Payne Lucas

✕ The Evil That Is Renamo

THE boy smiled hesitantly and shook hands. "He's beginning to come out of himself," the American nurse said, explaining that the young Mozambican had little to smile about. Renamo guerrillas had slit his parents' throats while he watched, and when he found his way to safety in neighboring Malawi he became one of 450,000 Mozambicans to flee there during the past 19 months.

At least 870,000 of Mozambique's 14 million people have sought refuge across the nearest border. Another million villagers, driven from their homes by Renamo attacks and the disruption of agricultural production, have been displaced within Mozambique.

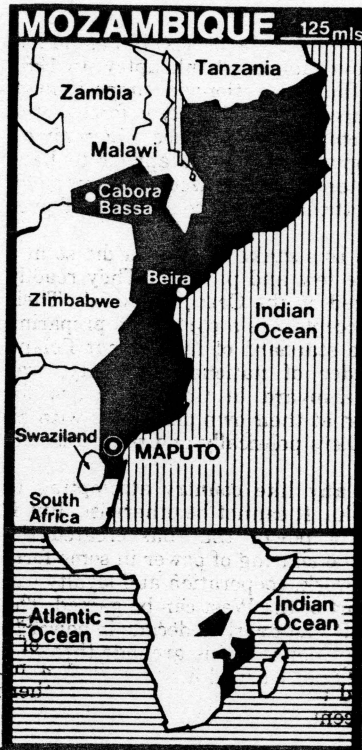
As a pawn on the chessboard of southern Africa, Mozambique has been sacrificed in a game of white against black. First by Portugal during its five centuries of colonial exploitation. Next by Ian Smith's Rhodesia, which punished Mozambique militarily for supporting Zimbabwean independence. And now by South Africa, which had set out to neutralize Mozambique's capacity to serve as a base for anti-apartheid movements.

To achieve this end, South Africa transformed Renamo — a body summoned to life by Rhodesian intelligence in 1976 — into one of the world's most active terrorist organizations.

How else to describe a group that last July slaughtered more than 400 men, women and children in the town of Homoine? Which has committed countless other atrocities throughout this country twice the size of California? Which makes 10-year-old boys into killers? Which has destroyed hundreds of rural clinics and schools and paralyzed economic activity in the country?

UNICEF reported last year that the destruction of health posts and the interruption of Mozambique's successful vaccination campaign had condemned tens of thousands of children to die of measles and other preventable diseases. Mozambique's children die every day so that apartheid may live.

Although there have been frequent press and other reports detailing Renamo's terror, many Western observers have responded with disbelief. A State Department



report leaves little comfort for the skeptics, and even less for those who have actively promoted Renamo as a "democratic" alternative to the socialist government in Maputo. The report, based on interviews with 196 Mozambican refugees in several countries, estimates conservatively that Renamo has murdered as many as 100,000 civilians.

The Khmer Rouge at least had a political philosophy to explain its killing fields in Cambodia. Renamo has none; in fact, it appears to be a rogue elephant intent upon destroying the very people a "conventional" guerrilla movement might otherwise pretend to lead.

According to refugee testimony, Renamo methodically targets entire communities for virtual extermination. Civilians, says the new report, are "victims of purposeful shooting deaths and executions, of axing, knifing, bayoneting, burning to death, forced drowning and asphyxiation." Eyewitness accounts indicate that children, often together with mothers and elderly people, are also killed.

Those of us engaged in support-

ing the development of Mozambican villages have been aware of fighting a losing battle with Renamo. We and the Mozambicans cannot build faster than Renamo tears down. We believe, however, that the international community now has a compelling moral obligation to confront massive evil with massive good.

Foreign donors are about to meet in Maputo to pledge increased financial assistance to sustain a new economic rehabilitation program emphasizing Mozambique's agricultural potential.

Mozambique needs the dollars, but the readiness of Western nations and institutions to stand by its government and people might also convince many in Renamo to abandon their rebellion without a cause. A few have already accepted the government's offer of amnesty.

In the meantime, there are more than 4 million Mozambicans to sustain: the 870,000 refugees scattered among camps from Tanzania to South Africa; the million or more displaced people within the country, and perhaps another 2.5 million nutritionally "at-risk" because of Renamo activity.

The refugees are the most visible victims. Hundreds have been crossing into Malawi daily for the past several months. The new arrivals, mostly women and children, can be seen gathered around the barrel-like trunk of a baobab tree, waiting to be registered, immunized, given rations and told where to build a hut. They may have walked for weeks, eating leaves and roots and carrying a small bundle of meager possessions. Most are naked except for a piece of grain sacking wrapped about their hips. The children are severely malnourished, and some will die.

Flight itself is a calculated risk, taken only when the possibility of violent death becomes too palpable. Renamo evidently kills many who try to escape areas over which it exerts loose control. But most of those who reach safety, pitiable as they may be, should live to return home and begin to build again.

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