

A euphemism that stands for bandits

NEGOTIATIONS to end the horrific war in Mozambique are going ahead fitfully in Rome. That is good news. At least they are still on track.

But sooner or later the peace effort is going to bump into the Third Force, and that is when the toughest problem may be encountered.

You probably have not heard of the Third Force in the Mozambique context. It is a term that is only now being used hesitatingly, for want of anything else. But when you read reports of murder, mutilation, rape, arson, robbery and abduction in Mozambique, you are probably reading about the Third Force.

You may also be reading about Renamo, the rebel organisation, whose members are known to engage in similar activity. Or even about some of the armed forces of the Frelimo government, some of whom are believed to have done so on a smaller scale. But there is probably a greater likelihood that you are reading about the Third Force.

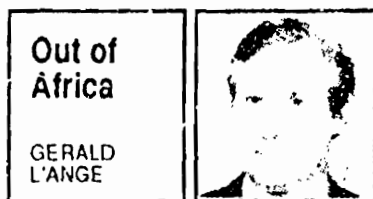
Robbing

It is a force only to the extent that it is capable of killing and robbing people. It has no name, organisation, policy or leader. It exists as an amorphous element that derives its only form from the common preoccupation of its members with banditry, a loose brotherhood of the damned

It consists of men — and even 10-year-old boys, now — who have found it easier to live by robbery than by work. Its membership is thought to include not only outright bandits but also some Renamo members and perhaps even some of the sometimes unpaid government troops.

Nobody seems to have any idea how these bandits are to be dealt with when Frelimo and Renamo eventually reach a settlement. But if they are not eliminated or controlled, it may be impossible to implement the peace agreement, impossible to start rebuilding devastated Mozambique.

Immediately, the Third Force may bedevil the agreement reached with Renamo whereby it will stop attacking the line built to carry electricity from the Cahora



Bassa dam to South Africa.

A special force of 2 000 Mozambicans is being trained to protect the construction crews repairing the hundreds of pylons sabotaged by Renamo on that line. The force will use trucks, equipment and rations supplied by the SADF. But will it be any more effective in guarding the construction crews than the Frelimo army was in guarding the toppled pylons?

Arguing

And in the meantime no special protection is being provided for the power line, road and railway that run from Komatipoort to Maputo. Renamo have not agreed to stop attacking those lines, arguing that, unlike the Cahora Bassa line, they directly benefit the Frelimo government.

Frelimo troops are supposed to provide protection, but seem unable to stop Renamo from cutting the power line and Renamo and/or elements of the Third Force from attacking traffic on the road and railway. It seems that sometimes the Frelimo troops who are supposed to ride shotgun on the trains have suddenly vanished when the trains are attacked.

When Frelimo and Renamo reach a settlement it will not only be necessary to protect communications lines from the Third Force, however. It will also be necessary to protect whole rural areas and isolated villages so that life can get back to productive normality in Mozambique.

Suggestions that South African troops might be deployed in Mozambique against the Third Force are firmly squelched in Pretoria. And Zimbabwe will not want to do more than protect the Beira and Limpopo corridors.

So who will stop the Third Force? Perhaps the best people for the job will be Renamo, which spawned it. □