

Dealing with Mozambique's contras

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The bloody war in Mozambique goes on. Although South Africa denies it, every other government with any interest in the problem assumes that the racist regime finances the Mozambican National Resistance Movement. Renamo is a vicious rebel force that since 1976 has massacred thousands of innocent civilians and attacked farms, railways and towns in an effort to destroy Mozambique's faltering economy.

The Marxist government of Mozambique, headed by President Joaquim Chissano, is struggling to turn the country's fortunes around. Economic policies have been redirected from classic Marxist models to a more market-oriented economy. External ties have been turned away from Soviet dominance and toward nonalignment. Among those that now support the government of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) are Britain, the European community, India, Canada and the United States, most of which send some kind of aid to the floundering African nation.

Support from the United States has been controversial in Washington. Conservatives such as North Carolina Republican Senator Jesse Helms are pressuring the administration to switch from support for the Frelimo Marxists to support for Renamo. In the mind of Mr. Helms and his allies, Frelimo is a kind of contra force, fighting communism.

The comparison is sadly apt, but Mr. Helms's approach to it

has managed to miss the point. Like the Nicaraguan contras, Renamo would not exist were it not for an outside power. Like them, Renamo has very little popular support. Like the contras, it is guilty of atrocities in the countryside, but on a scale that the Central American rebels have never achieved.

But whereas the United States has organized and financed the contras, in effect putting itself on the wrong side of history, its actions in Mozambique describe a model of how U.S. policy might work well. In effect, the United States is using a carrot rather than a stick to persuade the Chissano government to balance its loyalties between east and west. The U.S. Congress has forbidden military aid to Mozambique, but the United States gives food and development assistance. In 1987, U.S. aid amounted to \$85-million.

The latest round in the U.S. po-

litical war over Mozambique was fired this week by the State Department, which issued a report on the war, estimating that Renamo has caused more than 100,000 deaths in the past two years. About 870,000 desperate people have been driven into exile. And the report details the torture and execution of village members and the rape and forced labor of captives.

The State Department has been known in the past to exaggerate when its interests are at stake, but several independent reports have reached similar conclusions about Renamo's actions. What is now accepted is that no genuine development can go ahead in Mozambique unless the war is stopped. About four million Mozambicans are threatened by hunger, and more than a quarter of the country's population of 14 million is threatened by fighting.

The Chissano government has made some gestures to Renamo — offering amnesty to the rebels, for instance — but a political solution is still a long way away.

In the meantime, it might be necessary for countries such as Canada and the United States to follow in Britain's footsteps and provide non-lethal defensive military aid to Mozambique. Without surveillance aircraft and first-rate communications equipment, for instance, the country cannot defend its vital transportation networks and rail corridors. Without it, western development aid simply provides targets for Renamo rebels to destroy.