

ROBERT B. ADOLPH JR.

As refugees flee the amorality, think of the threatened three



Three American soldiers are caught in the meat grinder of nation-state politics, war and diplomacy.

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina —

Among all the shot and shell, hundreds of thousands of fleeing refugees, and against the backdrop of amoral political maneuvers in Yugoslavia, there are three lonely men, probably occupying a cell.

Perhaps they are alone or perhaps they are all together. Nobody knows.

These Americans were performing a peacekeeping mission along the Macedonian border when they were captured by Serb forces.

They are Staff Sgts. Andy Ramirez and Chris Stone and Spc. Steve Gonzales.

By way of comparison with what has happened to hundreds of thousands of ethnic Muslim Albanians in Kosovo, their plight might not seem so bad.

Reports from Belgrade tell us that the three soldiers are being held, but that they are being treated well and humanely.

There is of course a very real difference here. These are American soldiers.

These are our men in uniform.

Try, if you will, to imagine how these three men must feel. They are probably cut off from all sources of outside information.

They know their lives are held hostage, but they do not know for what purpose.

Since capture, each soldier, in his own mind, probably has already imagined the worst possible scenarios that might culminate with his death.

They are no doubt frightened. Who wouldn't be? It is not the known but the unknown that we most fear.

Their thoughts will more often than not dwell on their families and loved ones.

They will wonder whether they will ever see them again.

They will be concerned about how their brethren in uniform and the American public will view their captivity in terms of their comportment — that they behave well in their role as American soldiers and do not bring shame on the uniform they wear or the nation they represent.

If they survive, they want to know they acted honorably while held in captivity.

If they are kept separated and alone it will be tougher for them.

Vietnam POWs were often

kept in isolation.

We are social creatures. Loneliness can do terrible things to us.

Some of these Vietnam POWs, after years of isolation and mistreatment, allowed themselves to die rather than face the horrors of continuing singularity and deprivation.

The man responsible for so much terror and death in Kosovo will not look kindly upon our soldiers.

Milosevic is an amoral thug who will use these soldiers as bargaining chips — alternating between threats to their lives with a sham trial and promises of humane treatment.

I suspect that all attempts at release will fail. The soldiers' only hope may be a desire on Milosevic's part to make a grand humanitarian gesture in an attempt to gain favor in the West — but I wouldn't hold my breath.

These three soldiers are the only bargaining chips the Serb leader possesses.

He will probably hold onto them tightly and with both hands.

Milosevic is a power politician and dictator. It is the only way he knows. He is steeped in the ways of using human lives as chattel.

His brutality was further tempered during the Balkan War in the first half of this decade, where he presided over mass executions and ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian Muslims.

His recent vicious activities in Kosovo do not suggest the possibility he will have a change of heart.

Three American soldiers in Yugoslavia are caught in the meat grinder of nation-state politics, war and diplomacy. Their future is uncertain.

This is the risk that all Americans in uniform must face.

Andy Ramirez, Chris Stone and Steve Gonzales are now held hostage in the high stakes poker game that is war.

If you pray, you might say a prayer for these men before bed tonight.

Right now they are the loneliest men on the planet. □

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