

Bassiouni: Yugoslav Trial of U.S. Servicemen 'Just a Stage' for Milosevic

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DARYN KAGAN, CNN ANCHOR: Speaking of the U.S. servicemen, Yugoslavia says it will put the three on trial as early as today.

Let's find out what that might mean.

Joining us right now from Chicago is Cherif Bassiouni. He is a former war crimes investigator who has studied alleged Geneva Convention violations by Yugoslavia in Bosnia. He is also a professor of law at DePaul University.

Good morning, sir. Thanks for joining us. [L] [SEP]

CHERIF BASSIOUNI, FMR. WAR CRIMES INVESTIGATOR: Good morning.

KAGAN: Let's talk about when we are mentioning terms like "trial" and "court." What does that mean in terms of Yugoslavia? Is that what Americans are used to when they think of court and trial?

BASSIOUNI: No, I think it is important to realize that the Milosevic regime has set up what they call a "provisional government" in Kosovo, which consists mostly of the cronies of Milosevic and they are mostly party people with a few paramilitary and military people. They are running the show in Kosovo because they are conducting a massive ethnic cleaning campaign.

KAGAN: So what kind of trial would they come up with?

BASSIOUNI: The goal of what they are doing really is just a stage. What they are trying to do is create the impression of what they call a trial and, in fact, you will have conflicting reports coming out of there. Is it a trial? Is it a preliminary hearing? Does the Geneva Convention apply? All these peoples who are spy? All of that is going to be

designed to get the American media and public attention away from the ethnic cleansing on to that particular show that is being staged for us.

KAGAN: If that is true, then isn't it in Slobodan Milosevic's interest to keep these three U.S. servicemen alive.

BASSIOUNI: Oh, I am sure he will keep them alive and I am sure he will use them as puppet on that stage. What we will see is conflicting terms so that we will be diverted from our attention. These men were illegally seized. They were tortured in violation not only of the Geneva Convention, but of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, and they will use these men in an illegal way to detract attention from the crimes that are being committed.

KAGAN: Cherif Bassiouni, thank you for your perspective this morning.