John On a Botany Expedition in the Deep Reaches of the Amazon

John, on a botany expedition in the most remote regions of the Brazilian jungle, stumbles into a clearing where he finds two men with their guns trained on a group of ten South American villagers. The Captain, or the man who appears to be in charge, turns to John and announces that “Pedro here” is about to shoot “all the villagers,” but as the result of John’s unexpected arrival on the “scene,” he, the Captain, has had a sudden bout of compassion and if John would be willing to take Pedro’s gun and kill one of the villagers, he, the Captain, would allow the other nine villagers to go free. If, however, John refuses to accept the Captain’s offer, “Pedro here will shoot them all.”

John, his mind racing, entertains several “Indiana Jones” fantasies (with himself as Indiana Jones), among them, the idea that he might appear to agree to the Captain’s offer, take the gun from Pedro, and then turn it on Pedro and the Captain, back away into the jungle with all ten villagers at his side, and escape to a clearing down river where a small twin-engine Cessna is waiting and fly all the villagers and himself to Rio de Janeiro and freedom. But it is quite evident from the situation that if John were to try anything of the sort, his “heroics” will result not only in the deaths of all ten villagers but his own as well.

What should John do?

With great reluctance and a heavy heart, John elects to accept the Captain’s offer. John shoots one of the villagers and the Captain releases all the others who promptly disappear into the jungle. With a somewhat inappropriate, i. e., all too cheery, farewell, the Captain and Pedro head off in the opposite direction. John slumps down. The body of the villager lies a few yards away. John wonders what he has done.

Just then a helicopter swoops into view and lands in the middle of the clearing. Several Brazilian police emerge, their weapons drawn, and surround John. John is now in a small holding cell somewhere along the upper Amazon. He has made a phone call to Alice, letting her know that he has been charged with murder.

Forget, for a moment, how you would defend John, if you were to defend him at all, on legal grounds. What is your immediate intuitive response? Did John do the right thing? In this situation, under the circumstances as outlined, what is the right thing to do?