

Elian's case; Reno lacked sensitivity

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Body

Elian Gonzalez, through no wish of his own, has become the world's most photographed little boy over the past five months. But the image that may prove to be the most remembered of **Elian's** saga is that of a federal agent -- armed with a submachine gun and dressed in bulletproof vest, helmet and goggles -- confronting the screaming six-year-old.

Putting the debate over **Elian's** custody aside, it is impossible to rationalize how U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno came to the conclusion that the only solution to the impasse was breaking in the door of the Miami home of **Elian's** relatives so an eight-member tactical team could seize the boy.

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As well, 53 members of the Immigration and Naturalization Service were assigned to surround the house and keep the crowd back. Overall, 131 immigration agents and 20 U.S. Marshalls had assembled for the operation.

Surely, there was a better way to resolve the obviously difficult **case** than to risk any further trauma to Elian. This is, after all, a little boy who had drifted in an inner tube at sea for two days after his mother drowned during an attempt to escape Cuba's dictatorship.

Obviously, agents were prepared to kill individuals in the house and, if so, why? Reno ordered the raid although there were still attempts to negotiate a compromise with **Elian's** relatives going on early Saturday. There are still more than two weeks to go before the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals hears arguments over whether Elian should be allowed to file for asylum in the U.S. against his father's wishes.

Reno did not have to move so quickly and endanger the lives of both Elian and his extended family. This **case**, charged with the the political agenda of Fidel Castro and the passion of Cuban-Americans who see Elian as a symbol of every Cuban's struggle for freedom, demanded far more sensitivity than that displayed by the Clinton administration.

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