

## Political Memo;

### After U.S. Agents Seize Cuban Boy, Giuliani Seizes an Issue

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## **Body**

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For the second time in two days, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani seized on the Elian Gonzalez case yesterday to mount a harsh attack on President Clinton.

He accused the president of coordinating foreign policy with a totalitarian regime, of ignoring peaceful means of reuniting the boy with his father, and of authorizing a "gross overreaction" by armed immigration officials who grabbed the boy in a predawn raid Saturday.

"Consider the level of armament used," Mr. Giuliani told reporters yesterday, moments after passing out Easter baskets to sick children at Metropolitan Hospital Center in Manhattan. "It's astounding, for a 6-year-old boy and a family that has no history of involvement in organized crime, terrorism or anything like that."

He added: "They were pointing machine guns at them, and they were dressed up as if they were in the middle of a war action. So there's no question that it was a gross overreaction."

In theory, any connection between little Elian and the mayor of New York City would seem negligible. With all the challenges confronting Mr. Giuliani -- understaffed summer schools, criticism of police tactics, a troubled welfare-to-work program -- one might guess that he would have little more than passing interest in the international saga of a 6-year-old Cuban refugee in Miami.

But for the past two days, Mr. Giuliani has focused his public remarks on the boy, as if Elian had washed ashore on Governors Island instead of the coast of Florida. He opened his press conference on Saturday with a statement about the case. Then he accepted an invitation to discuss the case on CNN with Larry King, who, in a slip of the tongue, referred to him as the "mayor of Miami." Last night, Mr. Giuliani appeared on Fox to discuss the case.

Sunny Mindel, the mayor's spokeswoman, said there was a straightforward explanation for the mayor's comments on the case. "He feels very strongly about it, in addition to which, he is available to the press and the press is asking about it," she said. "And he's answering."

But the mayor has his doubters, especially in the camp of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, his opponent for a seat in the United States States Senate. Howard Wolfson, a spokesman for Mrs. Clinton, accused Mr. Giuliani of exploiting Elian Gonzalez for political advantage.

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"As far as I'm aware, this is one of the few national issues that the mayor has been willing to take a position on or talk about."

Ms. Mindel said in response: "This is a typical Clinton attempt to deflect responsibility. They chose this excessive display of force."

And Kim Serafin, a spokeswoman for Mr. Giuliani's campaign, said he had taken positions on a variety of national and international issues. "If they would do a search," she said of Mrs. Clinton's staff, "they would find that he's even been criticized for taking positions on too many issues."

But clearly Saturday's raid to reunite Elian with his father offers Mr. Giuliani an enticing package of political benefits. At a time when he faces marches and protests against his Police Department's aggressive tactics, Mr. Giuliani has presented himself this weekend as a champion of law enforcement moderation on the question of Elian Gonzalez.

The Clinton administration, he said yesterday, should have spent more time using dialogue and mediation. At the very least, he said, the administration should have first obtained a court order, followed by several "low key" attempts to execute the order without resorting to force.

"Those attempts were never made," he said, contrasting his preferred approach with the 151 heavily armed federal agents who took part in Saturday's raid.

"That's the level of armament you would use if you were arresting vicious horrible terrorists," said Mr. Giuliani, who is a former federal prosecutor. "I can remember arresting organized crime figures with considerably less armament than that -- Fat Tony Salerno and Paul Castellano. These are people who specialize in murdering other people. I can remember arrests of terrorists. And there there was a higher level of armament than the organized crime figures, but nothing like that."

At another moment later yesterday, Mr. Giuliani urged people to compare the law enforcement tactics in Miami with those of the New York's Police Department. "Think of how lucky you are to have the kind of police department you have in New York City, how restrained it is, the way in which they handle crowds."

Though Mr. Giuliani built a reputation out of being a tough prosecutor, he was fiercely criticized at the time by those who said he hounded and humiliated suspects with publicity-seeking arrests, several of which were later overturned.

Wall Street executives still remember how he ordered the arrest in 1987 of three traders, one of whom was led across the floor of Kidder, Peabody in handcuffs. Two years later, one trader pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and the investigation against the others was dropped.

For Mr. Giuliani today, speaking out about the case on national broadcasts also gives him a opportunity to try to make new campaign donors out of conservative, out-of-state Republicans who detest the Clintons.

Ms. Serafin said that Mr. Giuliani's television appearances have nothing to do with fund-raising. "The mayor's simply re-affirming his long held convictions." But about half of the \$19 million Mr. Giuliani has raised so far has come from out-of-state donors. And his reference on Saturday to "storm troopers using guns" has immediate resonance for the many Republicans who have expressed concerns about the federal government's tactics at Waco and Ruby Ridge.

And yesterday, Mr. Giuliani once again described the president as the puppet of a brutal Communist dictator. "The reality is that this has something to do with his relationship with Fidel Castro," Mr. Giuliani said of Mr. Clinton. "It's not by accident that Fidel Castro had a tremendous demonstration in Cuba yesterday."

"The big winner yesterday," he continued, "was Fidel Castro. He's been orchestrating this. And when you got up yesterday morning, and you looked at what was happening in Miami, for a moment you had to say to yourself, 'No,

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no, no. That's not America. That's happening in Cuba. That must be happening in Cuba.' Not only did the Clinton administration adopt Fidel Castro's position, they're now adopting his tactics."

Mrs. Clinton's spokesman, Mr. Wolfson, dismissed Mr. **Giuliani's** remarks. "I think when you call **United States** law enforcement personnel storm troopers, that sounds like you're getting your talking points from the black helicopter crowd."

Such responses are aimed at bolstering a central theme of Mrs. Clinton's campaign -- that the mayor is simply too divisive, too strident, to make an effective senator. Last month, for example, Mrs. Clinton accused the mayor of intentionally polarizing the city by leading "a rush to judgment" against Patrick Dorismond, the unarmed black man who was shot and killed by undercover police officers.

"At a time when calmer heads are called for," Mr. Wolfson said, "the mayor finds a way to inflame a situation with angry rhetoric."

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## Graphic

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Photo: **After** passing out Easter baskets yesterday, Mayor Rudolph W. **Giuliani** continued his criticism of the government's seizure of Elian Gonzalez. (Frances Roberts for The New York Times)(pg. B4)

## Classification

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