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POINT-COUNTERPOINT

In Elian's Best Interest?

The Justice Department had no choice other than to use force.

By LAURA STOEHR
Editorial Writer

When a group of federal agents plucked Elian Gonzalez from his Miami relatives' home early Saturday morning, justice was served.

Facts concerning late-night negotiations between the parties remain muddled, but by stalling in past weeks, Miami relatives trapped the Justice Department into using force to reunite Elian with his father.

With the family's refusals to agree on a specific time and place for Elian to return to his father, Attorney General Janet Reno, a Miami native, was left without any alternatives. The family's uncompromising position meant that a peaceful transition could not occur.

So Reno ordered the rescue operation. And according to a national CNN/Gallup poll, nearly six in 10 people supported the government's operation to bring together father and son. However, Americans haven't made up their minds about the force used.

Unfortunately, it was necessary. To a family insistent on keeping the child with them at any cost, the message to release Elian only would be clear if it came from the lips of an armed agent.

Also, as in many operations, agents could not be certain what they would face from a potentially violent and politically charged crowd.

Of course, family members later accused the Justice Department of acting in a manner unbefitting a free government.

But that showdown was exactly what they wanted.

The family wanted millions of Americans to watch in horror at Elian's terror-stricken face as an agent ordered one of the fishermen who found him to release the boy.

The picture is not kind, but it's just another manipulative tool the family is using to provoke sympathy. I don't doubt that they wanted the boy. I do, however, question whether they remember the boy's interests.

After the raid, Marisleyis Gonzalez told reporters that she pleaded with agents to put down their guns.

But she, and the rest of the Lazaro Gonzalez clan, had plenty of time to bring Elian to the agents without thrusting him into a traumatic situation.

The family knew a raid was probably coming, and so on Friday afternoon they got ready, not by preparing Elian, but by choosing photographers to man the house.

When agents arrived, they yelled for 20 seconds - in Spanish and English - for someone to open the front door.

The family had more time to turn over Elian when the agents broke down the front door.

Instead, though, in spite of the impending search, the fisherman grabbed Elian and backed into a bedroom closet.

Elian was happy later Saturday when he met his father. And that's really what the operation was about - serving his best interests.

No one wanted Saturday's clash, but as President Bill Clinton said, "the law was upheld, and that was the right thing to do."

One look at Elian's face proves that Janet Reno was wrong.

By KELLI BOUTIN
Assistant Editorial Page Editor

On Saturday, a picture was worth a thousand outcries.

The Associated Press captured a moment that serves as silent testimony of the fact that the Justice Department screwed up royally in its handling of the transfer of the boy's custody. The image of a terrified Elian Gonzalez in the arms of one of the fishermen who rescued him, an MP-5 automatic rifle just inches from his face, speaks volumes.

No one can blame Attorney General Janet Reno for feeling as if she had no other options - the boy's caretakers were undeniably unhelpful throughout the process, finding every way they could to defy the government and delay the inevitable reunion of the boy and his father, most notably by failing to come to an agreement with Justice Department officials the night of the raid.

And if the standoff between the Gonzalez family and the government only concerned adults, a show of force in the wee hours of the morning would have been the right thing to do.

But a child was involved, and no 6-year-old even begins to grasp the concept of law. Nor does a 6-year-old understand that the big, scary men wearing helmets and goggles and carrying big, scary guns are there to do something good.

True, Elian is no ordinary 6-year-old. Just picture how he held on to that raft for days on end. But just as that experience proved his amazing strength, it also most likely weakened him as well, leaving deep psychological scars.

The last thing the young boy needed was more trauma.

Because of the implications for the child's well-being, a situation like Saturday's raid should have been avoided at all costs.

And it could have been.

Aaron Podhurst, a friend of Reno's who acted as a spokesman for the Miami relatives during telephone negotiations on Saturday morning, said he believed an agreement was close at hand even as the eight agents kicked down their door. "I believe a deal was within minutes or an hour away," he said on the "Today" show. "I was shocked. I was disappointed. I couldn't believe what I was looking at on TV."

Because of the chance that a deal could have been hammered out, Reno should have held on just a little longer.

In the end, the right thing happened. Elian belongs with his father, especially because the INS had revoked Lazaro Gonzalez's temporary legal custody of the boy nine days earlier, but the events immediately preceding the reunion of Juan Miguel Gonzalez and his son are inexcusable.

If Reno felt the situation had deteriorated to the point where her agents had to seize the child, she should not have sent them in armed.

After months of spouting off about how the best interests of the child should be protected at all costs, the government did the worst possible thing for his future well-being, proving that actions do indeed speak louder than words.



Economic Globalization Inevitable

Chanting. Marching. Vandalizing. If the November riot in Seattle during the World Trade Organization meeting was the main event, last week's "mobilization for global justice" in Washington during the meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank was one hell of an encore.

Although the anti-globalization camp is totally misguided, it's not difficult to understand why some people believe some government agencies to be a racket for big business. The amount of congressionally authorized corporate subsidies is odious indeed.

Instead of giving handouts, government should focus on raising personal living standards via free trade policies and recognition of property rights. If organizations such as the IMF, WTO and the World Bank are the vehicles to achieve that end, they have fallen well short thus far.

The IMF, for example, originally was formed to provide short-term loans to foreign countries in order to promote free-market policies, but it instead has made many countries into loan addicts. In fact, 70 countries have depended on IMF credit for more than 20 years, without any movement toward economic liberalization.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Boris Federov last year said: "I strongly believe that IMF money injections from 1994 to 1998 were detrimental to the Russian economy and interests of the Russian people. Instead of speeding up reforms, they slowed them."

A similar sentiment can be expressed regarding the World Bank.

According to a recent Meltzer Commission report on international financial institutions, "many of the bank's failures result from lending to countries unprepared or unwilling to adopt wealth-creating policies."

And while the World Trade Organization has acted modestly to reduce trade barriers, most of the events that have opened up the world economy (such as the collapse of the Soviet empire and the emerging merchant class in China) have occurred without any help from the WTO.

Because none of these organizations has accomplished any significant pro-market reforms, it stands to reason that it is not the



JONATHAN TRAGER
THE LIBERTARIAN LETTERS

organizations themselves that protesters hate. They hate the essence of capitalism, or they think they do.

Consider that one major anti-globalization Web site claims increased corporate investment will "constrain the rights and opportunities of the majority of the world's people."

Excuse me, but exactly which opportunities would the presence of business constrain in these countries? The opportunity to bake in the sun all day without break to have scraps to feed your family or the opportunity to live in a communal toilet and die of preventable disease?

Investment, as it always has, does not constrain opportunities; it creates new ones.

Before capitalism, individuals not of royal birth were locked hopelessly into a state of poverty, whereby starvation and deadly epidemics were routine facts of existence.

With that in mind, let's look at what poverty is in contemporary America, courtesy of W. Michael Cox and Richard Alm's recent book, "Myths of Rich and Poor."

In 1994, 97 percent of "poor" households in America owned a refrigerator. About 92 percent owned a color TV set. More than 70 percent owned at least one car.

Department of Labor data shows that in the early 1990s, the median duration of a poverty spell was 4.2 months, proving that for those willing to work, poverty is largely a transitory experience.

Regarding overall opportunity, we can turn to data of the University of Michigan Panel on Income Dynamics and see that more than half of those earners in the lowest 20 percent income bracket in 1975 had reached one of the top three income brackets within four years.

We also see that in 1992 the number of black-owned businesses was up more than 46 percent from just five years earlier, while the number of female-owned businesses was up from 4.6 percent in 1972 to 33.2 percent. The earning gap between white men and blacks and women, a beloved subject of the mainstream media, has been shrinking and should continue to narrow for years to come.

Clearly, our capitalistic economy, although certainly not a pure free-market system, is still extremely dynamic, and opportunity for advancement in American society has never been more accessible.

America is not a nation of "haves" and "have-nots." It is a nation of "haves," "have mores" and "have mosts."

But such a situation only has come about within a democratic framework that recognizes private property rights and the importance of business investment.

Although protective tariffs certainly have played a part in American history, trade has still played an important role in our success. Were we to drastically reduce trade barriers, consumers would reap great benefits in the form of lower prices for higher-valued goods as per the theory of comparative advantage, which is taught in any basic macroeconomics course.

Many world leaders and their citizenry are now beginning to truly understand that free markets are the only way to escape rampant poverty.

Consequently, were the IMF, WTO and World Bank to disappear tomorrow, the trend toward economic globalization would continue unabated.

It's very easy for American activists to rally against "tainting" foreign societies with corporate influence.

But for those individuals who live in squalor, the choice of the status quo or the elimination of poverty via corporate investment and free trade is usually not a difficult one to make.

Jonathan Trager is a senior journalism and mass communication major from Long Island, N.Y., whom you can sponsor for only \$50 a day. Send cash contributions to trager@email.unc.edu.

READERS' FORUM

One Hour of Your Time This Week Could Make You an Anonymous Hero

TO THE EDITOR:

I feel compelled to write this letter in response to the lack of interest shown at the American Red Cross blood drives held on campus March 29 and March 30. It is my responsibility, as the director of the blood drives, to inform the students and faculty about the opportunity they missed to help save someone's life.

Every pint of blood that is collected by the Red Cross can save up to three lives. I realize that this is a busy time of year with exams and graduation approaching. However, it literally only takes an hour of your time to save a life.

The next opportunity to donate blood on campus will be today and Thursday.

The drives will be held in the Great Hall in the Student Union from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day. Anyone who comes will also have the opportunity to get typed for bone marrow donation.

The need for blood and blood products is great.

This region alone supplies more than 100 hospitals with blood that they need for their patients. Each hospital uses more than 1,500 pints of blood daily.

Just as it is one's civic duty to vote, it is also one's responsibility to donate blood. Only five percent of the population donates blood, yet more than 97 percent of the population will need a blood product by the age of 72.

The University has been participating in blood drives for many years. The last drives in March were disappointing because the two-day goal of 130 pints was not met. Only 87 pints of blood were collected.

Please join the American Red Cross in the Great Hall on Tuesday and Thursday to become an anonymous hero.

Thank you to everyone that has donated in the past.

Casey Copp
Director of Support Services
Orange County Chapter of the
American Red Cross

Robbins' 'Agenda' Too Idealistic; There Are Better Ways to Help

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Tara Robbins' April 20 column:

For once, Ms. Robbins is right: No person should be condemned to a life under a repressive regime. No one should ever go hungry.

Those damn communists have gone far enough!

Since America has the answer for an ogre like Fidel Castro, and since all the ills of communist nations are the fault of those who live there, I have some suggestions that will make it easier to realize Robbins' agenda.

First, let's send a 747 jumbo jet to Havana and fly all the Cubans we can to South Florida.

There, Elian Gonzalez's (distant) relatives, who seem affluent and caring enough, will surely take them all in! Then the immigrants can spend their days at

Disney World, wearing those neat little American flag shirts that Elian always has on!

Ooh, and let's do the same for the hungry!

I envision the entire population of Ethiopia being shipped to Alabama, where it will undoubtedly receive all the warm and wonderful benefits of capitalism.

Then we can crate up some Vietnamese, kidnap some Koreans and Shanghai some Chinamen. All these people would be better off under another, noncommunist system, so let's bring the rest of the world to the United States!

That, or we could allow those countries to be recolonized, which is the situation that necessitated the communist takeovers in the first place.

Or we could ask the American government to stop kidnapping citizens of other countries, like Elian, and instead the United States could help those countries attain a basic standard of living by raising embargoes, dismantling the International Monetary Fund, etc.

Robbins, though, seems to want only a

higher horse, from which to bluster more noticeably.

Josh Fennell
Junior
History

Spout Your Opinions All Semester Long

Is having the chance to write a guest column just not satisfying your urge to let the world know what you think?

Or do you express yourself better through drawings?

If either of these sounds like you, apply to be a columnist, editorial board member or cartoonist at the Daily Tar Heel next fall. Just stop by the DTH office in Suite 104 of the Student Union and pick up an application.

Applications are available starting at 8:30 a.m. today, and the deadline to apply is 5 p.m. May 4. Those who are selected will be notified by 5 p.m. May 9.

Questions? Call Editorial Page Editor-select Kelli Boutin at 962-0245.



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail forum to: editdesk@unc.edu.