



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on May 27, 2011

Arizona's Sheriff Joe Arpaio Arrests Three of His Own in Cartel Sting

[Reports](#) out of Arizona indicate that of the 16 people arrested on Tuesday, one was one of the Maricopa County Sheriff's own deputies and two were detention officers at the county jail.

Specifically, the former Arpaio subordinates were charged with various criminal activities including assisting a criminal syndicate, human smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering.

Arpaio, never one to shy away from controversial enforcement of the law he has sworn to uphold, told the media that the arrests were the result of a year-long operation that began with an anonymous tip.



After compiling and collating the mounting cache of incriminating evidence of locals conspiring with Mexican drug cartels, officials in the Maricopa County attorney's office decided that there was reasonable cause to issue warrants and they provided law enforcement with addresses of homes and businesses throughout the Phoenix valley on Tuesday.

According to a spokesman for the Maricopa County attorney's office, the arrests and searches resulted in seizures of more than \$200,000 in cash, seven weapons, 10 pounds of heroin, and seven vehicles, all used in furtherance of the criminal conspiracy.

In a prepared statement, Arpaio commented,

Today's arrests hit closer to home. The fight against drugs, illegal immigration and human trafficking is important not only to me but to the citizens of Arizona. That a deputy Sheriff would provide information to and collude with these drug and human traffickers is despicable.

Despite the potential for personal embarrassment from the fact that three of his own people were actively aiding the very transnational terrorists they were hired to combat, Sheriff Arpaio named names. The Maricopa County deputy charged is Alfredo Navarette, who had worked with the office since September 2000. The two employees of the county lock-up who stand accused are Sylvia Najera and Marcella Hernandez.

As one might expect to be the case in such bizarre arrangements, after her arrest Hernandez, hired by Maricopa County in April 2001, revealed that the father of her unborn child (she is eight months pregnant) is Lorenzo Arce-Torres, identified by Arpaio as a lieutenant in Mexico's ruthless Sinaloa cartel.

Over \$16,000 was seized from the purse Hernandez was carrying at the time she was arrested by deputies.



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At the time of his arrest, former sheriff's deputy Alfredo Navarette, a top aide to Arpaio for over a decade and former member of the anti-human-trafficking task force, was hiding two illegal immigrants, as well as 10 pounds of heroin.

Because Sheriff Arpaio is not exactly the picture of humility, his infamous self-promotion has prompted critics to describe this latest sting as a publicity stunt. They cite recent well-publicized malfeasance on the part of his office and staff and his upcoming reelection campaign as the likely reasons for the timing of these latest arrests.

It's not just "liberals" or pro-illegal immigration groups that are describing the latest busts as mere PR stunts, although these groups certainly took the opportunity to pile on.

[This](#) from the Huffington Post:

"He wants to show that he's in control," said Danny Ortega, a Phoenix lawyer and prominent critic of Arpaio's immigration raids, "especially in light of the fact that everybody's saying, 'look, either you're incompetent or you have no control over management.'"

Dan Pochova, the legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona, didn't go as far as to say that the arrests were a publicity stunt, but he argued that Arpaio is generally more concerned with PR than management. "He's obsessed with being able to put out press releases," Pochova said.

And when Arpaio needs material for a good press release, Pochova added, he's found it convenient to round up immigrants. "He's used a great amount of resources on that and took resources from other departments."

Though such criticism is typically dismissed by Arpaio as the work of the leftist media or pro-open borders activists, one of the most stinging and thorough indictments of the sheriff's official behavior comes from an unexpected [source](#) — the Goldwater Institute.

Named in honor of former Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, the Goldwater Institute is "an independent, non-partisan organization that studies and broadens public policy discussion. The organization promotes limited government, economic freedom and individual responsibility, principals that were advocated by Republican stalwart and Arizona icon Sen. Barry Goldwater."

In a comprehensive 22-page [report](#) entitled "Mission Unaccomplished: The Misplaced Priorities of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office," the conservative think tank has accused the self-styled "toughest sheriff in America" of ignoring the genuine threat of violent crime in his jurisdiction to focus more on the raids that he knows will attract the attention of the media. From the report:

Although MCSO is adept at self-promotion and is unquestionably a "tough" law-enforcement agency, under its watch violent crime rates recently have soared, both in absolute terms and relative to other jurisdictions....

It has diverted resources away from basic law-enforcement functions to highly publicized immigration sweeps, which are ineffective in policing illegal immigration and in reducing crime granularly.

The Goldwater report describes various "misplaced priorities" at the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office that have undermined the law enforcement mission that should be the primary focus of the office. Among the activities that have detracted from the law enforcement function, the Goldwater Institute reports lists:



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- Extensive trips by MCSO officials to Honduras for purposes that are “nebulous at best.”
- Misguided spending that created a financial crisis in 2007.
- A “huge” backlog of outstanding arrest warrants.
- The closure of satellite booking facilities, an action that has hindered other law-enforcement agencies.
- Excessive use of force and inadequate medical services at county jails.
- Chronically poor record-keeping and statistics reporting.
- Resistance to public disclosure.

Curiously, given his penchant for promotion, Sheriff Arpaio refused to discuss with *The New American* (or other outlets) the charges leveled by critics, including the Goldwater Institute.

Public relations stunt or not, the truth of the de facto surrender of miles of Arizona’s sovereign territory to the control of powerful Mexican cartels is indisputable. Regardless of whether the cracking down on and incarceration of those conspiring with these murderous gangs may divert attention from the Maricopa County Sheriff’s office’s recent problems, it is a noble endeavor and should be applauded — even if that was the goal all along.

Photo of Joe Arpaio: AP Images



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