

# Substantial Disruption



## Sheriff Joe and Trump's End Game

By Mike Tully

*I did it, I stand by it, and I'm not going to change.*

-- [Joe Arpaio](#)

Wednesday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 was like any other Wednesday in the computer building, a nerve center for a large governmental organization. The work was routine and unspectacular, but the data maintained by the center was important and, in some cases, confidential. Without warning, the raid started. Uniformed individuals stormed the building and seized control. Employees were ordered to leave their work stations while uniformed men and women confiscated their computers. The raiders compelled computer operators to give up their passwords before they escorted staff from the premises. Then they locked up the computer rooms, completing their militaristic take-over.

The armed raid was not in Venezuela, Cuba, or an Asian dictatorship. The location was Maricopa County's Computer Center and the raiders were uniformed personnel from the Sheriff's Department, led by Sheriff Joe Arpaio. The deputies threatened to arrest anybody who refused to cooperate, according to [news reports](#).

The seized records involved several County Departments, including the Sheriff's Department, the County Attorney, and the Superior Court. Arpaio insisted the records be maintained by the Sheriff's Department and filed a lawsuit to accomplish that, but the judicial proceeding was too slow for the Sheriff, who short-circuited the process in the August 12<sup>th</sup> raid with the swagger of a tinhorn dictator. Arpaio had become increasingly dictatorial since he took office in 1993 and the raid, while shocking in its blatant abuse of power, was emblematic of the man Andrew Cohen, in a [2016 essay for the Brennan Center](#), called "America's Most Lawless Lawman." *Rolling Stone's* Joe Hagan wrote about Arpaio in an article entitled, "[The Long, Lawless Ride of Sheriff Joe Arpaio](#)." That was in August, 2012. Arpaio would "ride" another four and a half years.

The Sheriff is infamous for discriminatory police practices and violation of the rights of Americans who were stopped and sometimes jailed simply on [account of their skin color or accent](#) -- enough in Arpaio's world to make them suspects. That was only part of Arpaio's lawless tapestry. While focused on immigration enforcement – a federal issue generally outside his jurisdiction – [he ignored hundreds of sex crimes](#), many involving children of minority communities. He [disregarded a federal court order](#) to correct life-threatening conditions caused by denying necessary medical and mental health care to jail inmates. He used his office to spy on perceived enemies and unlawfully jail political rivals. Arpaio and former County Attorney Andrew Thomas conspired to engage in political witch-hunts, filing bogus criminal charges ultimately costing County taxpayers millions of dollars in court settlements. While Arpaio escaped responsibility for his participation, Thomas did not: [he was disbarred](#) by the Arizona Supreme Court in 2012, along with his Chief Deputy.

The Court's *Opinion and Order Imposing Sanctions* referred to an "unholy collaboration" between the Sheriff and County Attorney. "The harm they caused," wrote the Court, "is incalculable." In a paragraph discussing Thomas and applicable to Arpaio, the Opinion stated:

*This case is regrettable proof that the absence of ethical behavior fuels uncontrollable actions ... All could and likely would have been prevented by simply allowing trained deputies and experienced county attorneys to do what they were trained to do. But that would have required risking a loss of the end game.*

The reference to "trained deputies" makes it clear the Court regarded Arpaio equally at fault. The Court had no jurisdiction over Arpaio, who is not a licensed attorney and not subject to the Court's disciplinary process.

Eleven individuals, including three retired judges and three former members of the Board of Supervisors, [collected](#) \$8.7 million from cases that incurred \$5.5 million in legal expenses, all part of the Arpaio – Thomas witch-hunt. Arpaio cost the County a \$3.75 million court settlement that [resulted from the false arrest](#) of the founders of the *Phoenix New Times*, a weekly journal critical of Arpaio. The arrestees, who were forcibly removed from their homes in the dead of night, were accused of violating the secrecy of a grand jury that never convened. One analysis [estimates](#) Arpaio cost taxpayers \$200 million in legal expenses and wasteful spending.

Arpaio not only flaunted the court's order to cease racial profiling, he hired an informant to investigate the judge's wife, as he admitted in [a hearing on a civil contempt matter](#). Arpaio was found guilty of civil contempt in 2016. A year earlier, he concealed evidence from the federal court, leading a judge to send U. S. Marshalls to [raid the Sheriff's Office](#). Arpaio's disregard for the rule of law and court orders led to his [conviction for criminal contempt of court](#) earlier this year. Arpaio never denied the actions that led to his conviction. He rationalized them by claiming, laughably, that the court order was vague and his attorney didn't explain it to him. The judge didn't buy it.

Joe Arpaio was more public menace than public servant. He abused his office, bullied and harassed political opponents and the media, and disobeyed court orders. The same people who love Arpaio love Donald Trump and the President [rewarded his loyal supporter and fellow "birther" with a pardon](#), a thumbs-up to the coliseum crowd. But Trump did not pardon a patriot; he pardoned a serial law-breaker. Apparently, Trump feared that declining to reward a rogue lawman and racist who abused the powers of his office could mean "risking a loss of the end game." That raises a troubling question: given what Arpaio did and what he represents, what, exactly, is Trump's "end game?"