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Pennsylvania Man Pleads Guilty To Terrorist Solicitation And Firearms Offense

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 9, 2011

WASHINGTON - Emerson Winfield Begolly, 22, of New Bethlehem, Penn., pleaded guilty today in Pittsburgh to soliciting others to engage in acts of terrorism within the United States and to using a firearm during and in relation to an assault on FBI agents.

The plea was announced by David J. Hickton, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania; Neil H. MacBride, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; James W. McJunkin, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office; and Michael A. Rodriguez, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Pittsburgh Division.

"Too often prosecutions arise only after a perpetrator commits actions ending in tragedy," said U.S. Attorney Hickton. "On this occasion, I commend the FBI for taking proactive steps to protect the people of the United States before any such tragedy could occur. I am proud of the coordination and cooperation of the various offices involved in this investigation in bringing Mr. Begolly to justice efficiently."

"Jihadist propaganda on the Internet is a serious threat to our safety, and today's plea is the latest example of our Office's efforts to aggressively identify and prosecute homegrown terrorists," said U.S. Attorney McBride. "Extreme radicalization can happen anywhere, and this case underscores the need for continued vigilance against homegrown terror threats."

"Today's guilty plea underscores the need for continued vigilance against homegrown extremism and use of the Internet to incite violence," said Assistant Attorney General Monaco.

"On a daily basis, Americans are faced with a complex threat environment that includes homegrown extremists who use web forums to share information and incite violence," said Assistant Director in Charge McJunkin and Special Agent Charge Rodriguez. "As this case unfolded, the FBI in Washington, DC and Pittsburgh, in close coordination with the Department of Justice and U.S. Attorney's offices in Pittsburgh and Alexandria, Virginia, worked quickly and effectively to eliminate the threat against U.S. citizens."

According to information presented by the government in court, Begolly was an active administrator on the Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum (AMEF), which is an internationally used Islamic extremist Internet forum. Using the pseudonym of Abu Nancy, Begolly systematically solicited jihadists to use firearms, explosives and propane tanks against targets such as police stations, post offices, Jewish schools and daycare centers, military facilities, train lines, bridges, cell phone towers and water plants.

In the summer of 2010 Begolly urged jihadists on the AMEF to "write their legacy in blood." Begolly promised a special place in the afterlife for violent action in the name of Allah. Following the reported shootings in Northern Virginia at the Pentagon and the Marine Corps Museum in October 2010, Begolly posted a comment online that praised the shootings and hoped the shooter had followed his previous postings encouraging similar acts of violence. On Dec. 28, 2010, Begolly further solicited his AMEF audience to violence by posting a manual on how to manufacture a bomb.

Days later, on Jan. 4, 2011, FBI agents were assaulted by Begolly as they attempted to prevent him from reaching a loaded 9 mm semi-automatic handgun, which he had concealed on his body. While violently struggling with the agents, Begolly bit the agents on their fingers in an attempt to free himself to reach his firearm. His actions are consistent with a posting in which he urged his audience not to be taken alive by law enforcement, to always carry a loaded firearm, and to aggressively resist any law enforcement encounter including biting fingers if necessary.

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Senior U.S. District Court Judge Maurice B. Cohill scheduled sentencing for Nov. 29, 2011.

These cases are being investigated by the FBI Washington Field Office and the FBI Pittsburgh Field Office. Assistant U.S. Attorney Neil Hammerstrom of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia's National Security and International Crime Unit, Assistant U.S. Attorney James Kitchen of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania's National Security and Cybercrime Section, and Trial Attorney Stephen Ponticiello of the Counterterrorism Section in the Justice Department's National Security Division are prosecuting the cases.

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U. S. Post Office & Courthouse, 700 Grant Street, Suite 4000 - Pittsburgh, PA 15219

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