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Pennsylvania Man Indicted for Soliciting Jihadists to Kill Americans

WASHINGTON – Emerson Winfield Begolly, 22, of New Bethlehem, Pa., was indicted by a federal grand jury in Alexandria, Va., today for allegedly soliciting Islamic extremists to engage in acts of terrorism within the United States and posting bomb-making instruction materials online.

The indictment was announced by Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Neil H. MacBride, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; James W. McJunkin, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI Washington Field Office; and David J. Hickton, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

“Today’s case underscores the continuing threat posed by homegrown extremists seeking to use the Internet to incite violence,” said Assistant Attorney General Monaco.

“Emerson Begolly is accused of repeatedly using the Internet to promote violent jihad against Americans,” said U.S. Attorney MacBride. “These allegations demonstrate how young people in the United States can become influenced by – and eventually participate in – jihadist propaganda that is a serious threat to the safety of us all.”

“Today, the FBI is faced with a complex threat environment that combines homegrown extremism and the Internet,” said Assistant Director in Charge McJunkin. “The FBI’s top priority is stopping terrorism, and we remain vigilant against those who solicit violent acts in the United States.”

“Those who attempt to harm or kill Americans will face a determined, coordinated law enforcement effort,” said U.S. Attorney Hickton.

According to the two-count indictment, Begolly has been an active moderator of a popular, internationally known Islamic extremist web forum, the Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum (AMEF), used by its members to promote and distribute jihadist propaganda. The indictment alleges that since July 2010, Begolly has placed a number of postings encouraging attacks within the United States, including the use of firearms, explosives and propane tanks against targets such as police stations, post offices, synagogues military facilities, train lines, bridges, cell phone towers and water plants.

Following the reported shootings in Northern Virginia at the Pentagon and the Marine Corps Museum in October 2010, Begolly allegedly posted a comment online that praised the shootings and hoped the shooter had followed his previous postings encouraging similar acts of violence that might “seem small but cause big damage.”

On Dec. 28, 2010, Begolly allegedly posted links to a 101-page document that contains information on how to set up a laboratory, conduct basic chemistry and manufacture explosives.

The indictment charges Begolly with solicitation to commit a crime of violence, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, and distribution of information relating to explosives, destructive devices and weapons of mass destruction, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

On Feb. 2, 2011, Begolly was indicted for allegedly assaulting federal agents and firearms-related charges in the Western District of Pennsylvania. He faces a maximum sentence of life in prison if convicted of the charges filed in that district.

Criminal indictments are only charges and not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty.

This case is being investigated by the FBI Washington 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, and Trial Attorney Stephen Ponticiello of the Counterterrorism Section in the Justice Department's National Security Division are prosecuting the case.