

Florida Man Indicted for Conspiring and Attempting to Provide Material Support to Terrorists

U.S. Attorney's Office Middle District of Florida
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JACKSONVILLE, FL—Acting U.S. Attorney A. Lee Bentley, III, along with Acting Assistant Attorney General John Carlin of the Justice Department's National Security Division and Michelle Klimt, Special Agent in Charge, FBI Jacksonville Division, today announced the return by a grand jury of an indictment charging Shelton Thomas Bell, 19, of Jacksonville, Florida, with conspiring and attempting to provide material support to terrorists. If convicted, Bell faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in federal prison on each of the two charges. Bell is currently detained in the Duval County Jail on unrelated charges.

According to the indictment, Bell devised a plan to travel to the Arabian Peninsula to join Ansar al Sharia (AAS), an alias for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and participate in violent armed conflict that he termed "jihad." AAS has taken responsibility for multiple attacks on Yemeni forces, including a suicide bombing during a parade in May 2012 that killed more than 100 Yemeni soldiers and a series of armed assaults in March 2012 that killed more than 100 people, including Yemeni soldiers.

The indictment alleges that between May 2012 and September 2012, Bell and others engaged in physical, firearms, and other training in preparation for armed conflict in the Middle East, which Bell described as "the actions of jihad." Bell allegedly solicited other individuals, including juveniles, to travel overseas with him in furtherance of this conspiracy. Bell made video and audio recordings intended to be distributed to others once he arrived in the Middle East, for the purpose of soliciting and recruiting others there to participate in violent jihad. In September 2012, Bell and a juvenile traveled to Amman, Jordan, and made contact with an individual who could facilitate their travel to Yemen to participate in violent jihad.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Jacksonville Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF). The JTTF is a multi-agency task force composed of full-time personnel from the FBI, U.S. Coast Guard Investigative Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. It will be prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mac D. Heavener, III and Department of Justice Trial Attorney Mara M. Kohn from the Department's Counterterrorism Section of the National Security Division.