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## Upland Terror Plot Suspect Had Been "Good Kid" Who Transformed

One of four accused of planning to kill Americans abroad, Miguel Santana was once a devoted Catholic, friends said

By Jacob Rascon and Melissa Pamer • Published November 20, 2012 • Updated on November 21, 2012 at 2:12 pm



One of three Southern California men accused of planning to join a mentor in Afghanistan to commit "violent jihad" had undergone a major transformation in the past two years, two people who knew him said.

Miguel Alejandro Santana Vidriales, 21, of Upland, had been a religious Catholic before turning to extremist Islamic views, according to a friend and a neighbor.

Along with Ralph Deleon, 23, of Ontario, and 21-year-old Arifeen David Gojali of Riverside, Santana is accused of plotting to join the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan. The three men – who were arrested in Chino Friday – were under the guidance of 34-year-old Sohiel Omar Kabir of Pomona, who was being detained in Afghanistan.

A complaint and affidavit that details the four men's plans – allegedly to target American soldiers and government facilities abroad – was unsealed late Monday. [FBI officials discussed the case](#) Tuesday.

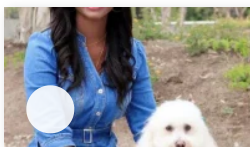
Santana, who was born in Mexico and had a pending U.S. citizenship application, said that he had always looked for violence and sought to fit in with groups, according to the affidavit.

Santana allegedly said he hoped Islam would let him "fit in and actually be able to fight for something that's right."

A man who described himself as a friend of Santana's but did not want to be identified said that Santana had changed.

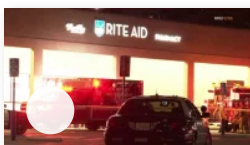
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"He was a really good kid. He was like a brother to me," said the man, who had gone to Upland High School with Santana.

The friend said that Santana had in the past two years begun going to mosque three times per day and discussing extremist ideas. The friend said Santana had tried to convert him to Islam.

"I feel like maybe he started turning to the Muslim religion because those guys who were converting him were there for him," the friend said. "So he felt like 'Oh, well, these are my brothers,' when in reality they were just brainwashing him."

Another woman, Morgan Ivara, who identified herself as a friend also said Santana had begun to act differently within the past year or so.

"He'd say something about God and it would be awful," Ivara said.

He had been a "hard-core Catholic" previously, she said. He began to post "weird stuff" on Facebook, she said. Ivara stopped talking to Santana six months ago, she said.

Santana's apartment in Upland was raided by FBI agents Friday, according to nearby residents.

If convicted on all counts, he faces 15 years in prison.

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