

Federal Agents Arrest Man After He Attempts to Bomb Bank in Oakland

U.S. Attorney's Office February 08,
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• Northern District of California (415) 436-7200

OAKLAND, CA—Federal agents arrested Matthew Aaron Llanaez, age 28, of San Jose, California, this morning after he allegedly attempted to detonate a vehicle-borne explosive device at a bank branch in Oakland.

Llanaez's arrest was the culmination of an undercover operation during which he was closely monitored by the FBI's South Bay Joint Terrorism Task Force. Unbeknownst to Llanaez, the explosive device that he allegedly attempted to use had been rendered inoperable by law enforcement and posed no threat to the public. Llanaez was charged this morning by criminal complaint with attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction against property used in an activity that affects interstate or foreign commerce.

The arrest was announced by Melinda Haag, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California; Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; and FBI Special Agent in Charge, San Francisco Field Office, David J. Johnson.

According to the affidavit filed in support of the criminal complaint, on November 30, 2012, Llanaez met with a man who led him to believe he was connected with the Taliban and the mujahidin in Afghanistan. In reality, this man was an undercover FBI agent. At this initial meeting, Llanaez proposed conducting a car-bomb attack against a bank in the San Francisco Bay Area. He proposed structuring the attack to make it appear that the responsible party was an umbrella organization for a loose collection of anti-government militias and their sympathizers. Llanaez's stated goal was to trigger a governmental crackdown, which he expected would trigger a right-wing counter-response against the government followed by, he hoped, civil war.

The complaint further alleges that Llanaez subsequently selected the Bank of America branch at 303 Hegenberger Road in Oakland as the target for the attack. Llanaez ultimately specified a spot next to a support column of the bank building as a good location for the bomb, expressed a desire for the bomb to bring down the entire bank building, and offered to drive the car bomb to the bank at the time of the attack.

According to the complaint, in January and February 2013, Llanaez and the undercover agent constructed the purported explosive device inside a sport utility vehicle (SUV) parked inside a storage facility in Hayward, California. As part of the process of assembling the device, Llanaez purchased two cell phones to be used in creating and operating the trigger device for the car bomb. One of these cell phones was incorporated into the trigger device itself. The other was reserved for use on the night of the attack.

The criminal complaint alleges that on the evening of February 7, 2013, Llaneza drove the SUV containing the purported explosive device to the target bank branch in Oakland. He parked the SUV beneath an overhang of the bank building where he armed the trigger device. He then proceeded on foot to a nearby location a safe distance from the bank building, where he met the undercover agent. Once there, Llaneza attempted to detonate the bomb by using the second cell phone he had purchased to place two calls to the trigger device attached to the car bomb. Federal agents then arrested him.

Llaneza made his initial appearance in federal court in Oakland this morning before U.S. Magistrate Judge Donna M. Ryu. The defendant's next scheduled appearance is at 9:30 a.m. on February 13, 2013, for a bail hearing before Judge Ryu. If convicted on the charge contained in the criminal complaint, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

The case is being prosecuted by the Special Prosecutions and National Security Unit of the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California. The prosecution is the result of an investigation by the FBI's San Jose Resident Agency, with the assistance of the FBI San Francisco Joint Terrorism Task Force, the California Highway Patrol, the San Jose Police Department, the Oakland Police Department, the Hayward Police Department, and the Union City Police Department.

The charges contained in the criminal complaint are mere allegations. As in any criminal case, the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.