

## 14 al-Qaida suspects detained in Brussels

European Union leaders began a two-day summit in Brussels on Thursday, authorities detained 14 suspected al-Qaida members, including one who may have been given instructions to carry out a suicide attack.

By Seattle Times news services  
Friday, December 12, 2008

BRUSSELS, Belgium — As European Union leaders began a two-day summit in Brussels on Thursday, authorities detained 14 suspected al-Qaida members, including one who may have been given instructions to carry out a suicide attack.

Moez Garsalloui, the main suspect believed arrested Thursday, is married to Malika El Aroud, who is famed among al-Qaida members as the widow of the assassin of Taliban nemesis Ahmed Shah Massood, who was killed in a suicide mission ordered by Osama Bin Laden two days before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Investigators tracked down the terrorist suspects after foiling a possible attempt to free Nizar Trabelsi, an al-Qaida sympathizer sentenced in 2003 to 10 years in prison for plotting an attack on a NATO military base in Belgium in December 2007.

The terror sweep came hours before a European Union summit brought together the heads of 27 countries in Brussels, though the site of the purported attack was unclear.

Nearly 250 police officers raided 16 locations in the capital and one in the eastern city of Liege overnight, confiscating computers, data storage equipment and a pistol.

Authorities said one suspect left a farewell video for his relatives, a sign he may have been preparing a suicide attack.

"The fact that there's a European Union summit in Brussels at this moment left the investigating judges and the federal prosecutors no choice but to intervene today," according to a police statement. "It could have been an operation in Pakistan or Afghanistan, but it can't be ruled out that Belgium or Europe were the possible target."



KARL MATHIS / AP  
Moez Garsallaou, right, and his wife, Malika El Aroud, arrive at the Federal Criminal Court in Switzerland last year

Moroccan-born El Aroud is a 48-year-old Belgian who calls herself a female warrior for al-Qaida and writes recruiting messages online in French under the name of Oum Obeyda.

"She is extremely active as a Jihadist who motivates" terrorists, **Claude Moniquet**, president of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center in Brussels. Moniquet said. "She was writing online as recently as three weeks ago. She is very dangerous."

El Aroud, who moved to Belgium from Morocco when she was very young, began writing online after her first husband was killed in the suicide attack in Afghanistan.

Massood was the anti-Taliban leader of the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.

Garsalloui was released in July 2007 after serving three weeks for promoting violence, and then disappeared. Belgian officials said he fled to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Moniquet said he was one of three suspects prosecutors identified as having recently returned from training camps along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Belgium in recent years has become home to a large community of North African and other Muslim immigrants.

Belgian authorities last year warned that Islamic extremists were planning to attack Christmas observances in Brussels.

*Compiled from The New York Times, Bloomberg News, The Associated Press and Los Angeles Times*