



6 Alleged Islamic Extremists Charged in Belgium

After Belgian terror sweep, 6 of 14 al-Qaida suspects charged

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Authorities on Friday arrested the Belgian widow of a man involved in killing an anti-Taliban warlord, saying she was part of an al-Qaida group that was about to launch a suicide attack.

Malika El Aroud, 49, was charged with belonging to a terrorist organization. Five men in their 20s were also charged; eight others were released for lack of evidence

El Aroud, dressed in black from head to toe, was pushed into a police car during a night raid early Thursday a few miles away from, and a few hours before, a summit of European Union government leaders was scheduled to open.

Authorities said she was too dangerous to walk the streets and even considered calling off the summit.

"It was considered as a possibility," said Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme at summit headquarters. In the end, the gathering went smoothly. Authorities said they cannot say whether an attack was planned in Brussels or elsewhere.

El Aroud has had a tumultuous life. As a child, she moved from her native Tangiers in Morocco to Belgium, where an unhappy youth led to failed relationships before she discovered fundamentalist Islam.



In this June 20, 2007 file photo, Belgium's Malika El Aroud & her Tunisian husband Moez Garsallaou, arrive at the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona, Switzerland. Belgian police on Thursday, Dec. 11, 2008 said they have detained 14 suspected Islamic extremists, including El Aroud, with links to the al-Qaida terror network.

(Karl Mathis, File/AP Photo)

She and her husband, Abdessatar Dahmane, went to Afghanistan, where he was killed during the assassination of anti-Taliban warlord Ahmed Shah Massoud two days before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

Turned into the widow of a martyr, El Aroud returned to Belgium, where, experts say, she since has been involved in radical networks in Belgium and Switzerland.

Investigators suspect her current husband, Moez Garsalloui, is now an important link of El Aroud's group in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

But **Claude Moniquet**, the president of the Brussels-based think tank European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, said he believes any attack would probably have targeted Europe rather than Afghanistan.

"Some of the terrorists who were arrested were just back from that country after they had received training; they would not go there anymore," he said.

"It is unlikely from a strategic standpoint that a new attack in Afghanistan would change much. In Europe, however, the impact would have been huge."

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