

# Suicide bomber 'was Belgian woman'

By David Rennie  
in Brussels

A BELGIAN-born convert to Islam has become the first European woman suicide bomber, killing herself recently in Iraq, French intelligence officials have claimed. The reports are being taken "seriously", Belgian sources said last night. If the woman, whose identity has not been released, is confirmed as a suicide bomber, she would be

the first European female known to have taken part in such an attack. European intelligence officials learned that US troops in Iraq recently found the remains of a European woman at the site of a suicide attack with a Belgian passport. Unconfirmed reports on RTL France radio, said that the woman's Belgian nationality had been established by her home country's security service, the Sûreté de l'Etat.

Belgian counter-terrorism experts had established that the woman converted to Islam and was married to an Islamist radical. Her passport showed that she had reached Iraq via Turkey, and that the journey was carried out partly overland, RTL stated. The fate of her husband is not known, the report said. About 10 per cent of all suicide attacks in recent years have involved women. But to date such attackers have been

of Middle Eastern or south-east Asian ethnic origin. Western converts have been involved in suicide plots. One was Germaine Lindsay, the Jamaican-born July 7 London Underground bomber. Another was Richard Reid, the London-born "shoe bomber" who unsuccessfully attempted to bring down an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami in December 2001. For Western security forces

already stretched to breaking point trying to guard against suicide attacks, it would be an additional blow to confirm that women of European appearance were also involved in active terrorist plots. A US military spokesman in Baghdad said he had information on two suicide bombings involving women on Nov 9 and Sept 28 but had no information about nationalities in either case. Claude Moniquet, a coun-

ter-terrorist and intelligence analyst in Belgium, said the sudden emergence of the story in the French press appeared to have "placed Belgium investigators in a very difficult situation". Mr Moniquet said: "If these reports are all true, they will have been working to roll up whatever network carried this woman to Iraq. We can expect imminent arrests in the next two or three days." david.rennie@telegraph.co.uk