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## Terror Arrests Ahead of E.U. Summit

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PARIS — The Belgian police arrested 14 people suspected of having terrorist links in raids early Thursday, including a woman who writes jihadist screeds on the Internet and three men the Belgian authorities said had just returned from training camps along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

One had “said goodbye to his loved ones,” according to the Belgian federal prosecutor, Johan Delmulle, leading to fears of an imminent suicide attack.

Though the possible target was not clear, the arrests came on a day when [European Union](#) leaders began a two-day summit meeting in Brussels. “We don’t know where the suicide attack was to take place,” Mr. Delmulle said in Brussels. “It could have been an operation in Pakistan or Afghanistan, but it can’t be ruled out that Belgium or Europe could have been the target.”

An investigation into the suspects had been under way for a year. But given the summit meeting, which effectively marks the end of the French presidency of the European Union, Mr. Delmulle said the Belgian authorities felt they had “no choice but to take action” or to sharply raise security around the meeting.

The police carried out 16 raids in Brussels and one in Liège. Those arrested include [Malika El Aroud](#), 49, who accompanied her husband to Afghanistan in 2001, where he trained in a camp run by [Al Qaeda](#) and then, days before the 9/11 attacks, helped kill the anti-[Taliban](#) resistance

leader, [Ahmed Shah Massoud](#). Ms. El Aroud, whose husband was eventually killed, writes online as “Oum Obeyda.”

Lieve Pellens, spokeswoman for the federal prosecutor’s office, described Ms. El Aroud as “a very important and serious lady” and said the prosecutor would argue that she was a decision maker and fund-raiser. The case, Ms. Pellens said, is about terrorism but also about “grand theft and robbery” to finance the group.

Ms. El Aroud’s current husband, Moez Garsalloui, was also believed to have been arrested on Thursday, according to **Claude Moniquet**, president of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center in Brussels. But there was no official confirmation of his arrest.

Mr. 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 Mr. Moniquet believes that he was one of three suspects prosecutors identified as having recently returned from training camps along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Another such person was tracked to South Asia but has not yet returned, Belgian officials said.

A statement from the federal prosecutor’s office said that several suspects seemed to have ties to Al Qaeda, and that there were “direct contacts between the group around the suspect ‘M. G.’ ” — the initials of Mr. Garsalloui — “and important people of the organization Al Qaeda.”

Ms. Pellens said she believed that the cases against the 14 were strong, based on the long period of investigation, surveillance and wire-tapping carried out by a team of 80 police officers.

The investigation stemmed from a case a year ago, when the Belgians arrested about a dozen people after the United States provided information that an attack in Brussels was imminent, Ms. Pellens said. Mr. Moniquet said that the pressure from Washington was so strong that the arrests were made before good cases could be made against the suspects, and all were released the following day. The target was believed to have been an American installation.

Both cases center on those close to Nizar Trabelsi, a former soccer player and member of Al Qaeda, the federal prosecutor's office said. He has been jailed in Belgium since 2001 for involvement in a plot to blow up a [NATO](#) installation there, and was also accused of being involved in a Qaeda plot to blow up the American Embassy in Paris.

To justify the arrests a year ago, Belgian authorities said the suspects then were involved in an effort to help Mr. Trabelsi break out of jail, even though evidence for such a plot was at least six months old at the time, Belgian officials said Thursday. The group arrested on Thursday also has ties to Mr. Trabelsi and his wife, Belgian officials said. Mr. Trabelsi is fighting an extradition request from Washington.

Mr. Moniquet, noting that some of those arrested on Thursday were returning from Afghanistan, said he assumed that the target was in Europe. And, he said, with President-elect [Barack Obama](#) pledging to put more troops in Afghanistan and pressing European countries to step up their presence there, "it's a good moment for those in Afghanistan to make an attack." Mr. Moniquet added, "Strategically speaking, it makes sense for them to hit Europe."

*Basil Katz contributed reporting.*