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FBI warns of major summer attack Political conventions, Olympics tempting targets for terrorists

Charlie Goodyear, Chronicle Staff Writer

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The FBI says it will issue an alert today to thousands of police departments warning of new and credible intelligence that suggests al Qaeda or other terrorists will attempt a major attack in the United States this summer.

Authorities say national and international events this summer, such as the Democratic and Republican national conventions, would be highly attractive to terrorists looking to cause mass casualties or strike symbolically at the United States.

"This is a confluence of a lot of activity that would logically be of interest to a terrorist," said FBI spokesman LaRae Quy in San Francisco.

Quy said the most recent intelligence was deemed threatening enough to warrant the creation of a special FBI task force whose sole mission is to thwart a terrorist attack this summer.

But the intelligence received is not specific.

"There's no time, there's no place, there's no date," Quy said.

Terrorists are already in the United States and may be seeking to use chemical, biological or radiological weapons in an attack, an unnamed intelligence official told the Associated Press.

The alert comes just days before the Memorial Day weekend and the dedication on Saturday of the World War II Memorial in Washington.

Other possible targets include the G-8 summit in Georgia next month, the Democratic National Convention in Boston in July, and the Republican National Convention in New York in August, Quy said.

Internationally, the Olympic Games in Athens, which start in August, have been a major concern for European and American security officials.

FBI Director Robert Mueller and Attorney General John Ashcroft are expected to address the issue at a press conference today in Washington. But federal officials said they have no plans to raise the current terrorism threat level from yellow to orange in the coming months.

Officials are expected to ask the public to watch for several suspected al Qaeda operatives as well as suspected terrorist sympathizers whom authorities will identify today, according to the Washington Post.

"We feel we need to be on heightened alert," Quy said. "Law enforcement needs to make a redoubled effort at getting out there and going over the leads we have to prevent another 9/11."

Quy called the latest intelligence "a general feeling or rumble, and we've had a lot of this before."

"They call it chatter, and we have had a lot of that," she added. "But I don't think there's a sense of panic or anything like that among law enforcement."

Last week, the FBI sent an alert to police across the country asking them to be on the lookout for suicide bombers, including terrorists disguised as pregnant women.

Experts have described al Qaeda as newly invigorated, drawing fresh recruits from the Muslim world angry about the U.S. war in Iraq.

Terrorists also have been emboldened by the Madrid train bombings in March that led to the fall of Spain's ruling party, which had supported the United States in Iraq, and was followed by the new government's withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq.

The planned June 30 handover to an Iraqi interim government and the November presidential election also are psychologically important markers to any terrorist group seeking to mount an attack.

"Any time from mid-summer up to November would be key," said Vali Nasr, a professor of Middle Eastern and Asian politics at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey. "The stars are aligning to expect a show of force, a show of defiance by al Qaeda."

Nasr also said a rumor running through the Muslim world predicts the capture of Osama bin Laden as an "October surprise" designed to give President Bush a boost at the ballot box.

"The feeling is that bin Laden will be captured in October," Nasr added. "An act of terrorism would be designed to undermine that expectation."