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To: "'George Poste'

"'Elmo R. Zumwalt'"

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### U.S. Military Wants No Domestic Law-Enforcement Role

A column in USA TODAY last week implied that the Defense Department is seeking an active role in domestic law enforcement. That is absolutely wrong. Ironically, we strongly agree with the headline ("Terrorist attack in U.S.? Don't put military in charge," The Forum, Thursday).

Like any federal agency with the appropriate training and resources, the Defense Department has a proper role to play in preparing America for a terrorist attack involving chemical or biological weapons. As part of an ongoing federal interagency effort and because it has long prepared to face such attacks on the battlefield, the Defense Department is doing its part to prepare the nation by supporting lead federal agencies in their efforts.

However, we fully understand and have stated repeatedly that any such assistance will be in support of the appropriate federal civilian authority -- either the Department of Justice or the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Our efforts to date -- including special National Guard teams that will advise and assist communities upon request and the training of local emergency "first responders" under a program mandated by Congress and now being transferred to the Justice Department -- remain consistent with this supporting role.

There are no plans to create a "Homelands Defense Command" or any other military institution to oversee civilian-led response efforts.

Indeed, our new Joint Task Force-Civil Support is specifically tailored to coordinate only the military component of such an effort, to support state and local authorities and the lead federal agency.

The law and the Defense Department's implementing policies are clear: The military is not to conduct domestic law enforcement and will support local law enforcement agencies only when explicitly authorized to do so. Moreover, a long history of successful military support to communities ravaged by disasters such as Hurricane

Floyd is clear. The American people need not fear our preparations. The greater threat to our civil liberties stems from the aftermath of an attack for which we had failed to prepare.

John J. Hamre, Deputy secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C.

Editor's Note: The column referred to appeared in the Current News Early Bird, October 1, 1999.