

The prospect that Al Qaeda or some other terrorist group might get its hand on a nuclear bomb is widely viewed as the scariest national-security threat facing the country. But more than a year after Congress passed a law creating a White House "czar" to focus on the issue, the post has yet to be filled—the apparent victim of yet another clash over presidential powers.

The provision creating a new special White House office to coordinate nuclear proliferation and counterterrorism efforts was tucked away in a landmark bill passed by Congress last year implementing the recommendations of the 9/11 commission. (At the same time, Congress created a commission to study the problem.)

"With this bill, we'll be keeping our promises to the families of 9/11 ... and we'll be making the American people safer," proclaimed Speaker Nancy Pelosi on July 27, 2007, as the massive bill was passed. President Bush signed the measure into law a few days later, hailing the act as another example of his administration's commitment to fighting terrorism.

But since then, barely a word has been heard about the "United States Coordinator for the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism," as the position is officially called in the 9/11 law. Nobody has been nominated by President Bush to fill the position. And the office that coordinator is supposed to run doesn't exist.

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