



# While America Sleeps: A Wake-up Call for the Post-9/11 Era

*Russ Feingold*

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**Former senator Russ Feingold looks at institutional failures, both domestic and abroad, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and proposes steps to be taken—by the government and by individuals—to ensure that the next ten years are focused on solving the international problems that threaten America.**

In *While America Sleeps*, Russ Feingold details our nation's collective failure to respond properly to the challenges posed by the post-9/11 era. Oversimplification of complicated new problems as well as the cynical exploitation of the fears generated by 9/11 have undermined our ability to adjust effectively to America's new place in the world. This has weakened our efforts to protect American lives, our national security, and our constitutional values. Ranging from institutional failures to "get it right" by Congress, the executive branch, and the media to the way we have spoken of the war on terror, the nature of Islam, and American exceptionalism, too often we have not made the best choices in confronting, in Churchill's words, the "new conditions under which we now have to dwell."

Senator Feingold explores the way in which the American public has been fed inadequate information or mere slogans to explain 9/11, Al Qaeda, and related events. This compares unfavorably with the candor often associated with, for example, FDR's fireside chats during World War II. Lumping Al Qaeda into a catch-all category known as "bad guys," failing to make it clear that Islam itself is not a threat to our way of life, and underestimating the extreme difficulty of fully invading individual countries as a way to root out international terrorism are examples of this misdirection. Moreover, our general inability to keep our eyes on the international ball seems to have grown even worse in the years following 9/11.

More than ten years after one of the greatest wake-up calls in human history, our nation seems to have again grown complacent about the issues that suddenly seemed so urgent immediately after 9/11. *While America Sleeps* suggests ways in which we can awaken a new national commitment to engage with the rest of the world and one another in a less simplistic and more thoughtful way. Feingold's hope is that when the history of this era is written, it will be said that our country was taken off guard at the height of its power at the turn of the century and stumbled for a decade in an unfamiliar environment, but in the following decade America found a new national commitment of unity and resolve to adapt to its new status and leadership in the world.

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