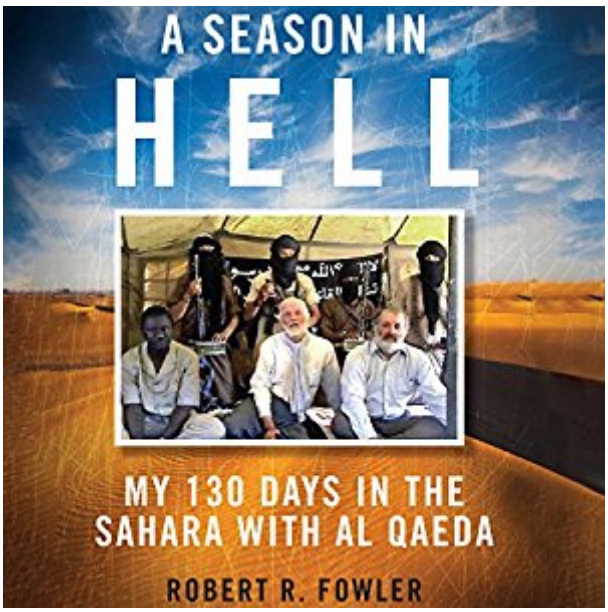
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A Season In Hell: My 130 Days In The Sahara With Al Qaeda



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Synopsis

For decades, Robert R. Fowler was a dominant force in Canadian foreign affairs. In one heart-stopping minute, all of that changed. On December 14, 2008, Fowler, acting as the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy to Niger, was kidnapped by Al Qaeda, becoming the highest-ranked UN official ever held captive. Along with his colleague Louis Guay, Fowler lived, slept, and ate with his captors for nearly five months, gaining rare first-hand insight into the motivations of the world’s most feared terror group. Fowler’s capture, release, and subsequent media appearances have helped shed new light on foreign policy and security issues as we enter the second decade of the "War on Terror." A Season in Hell is Fowler’s compelling story of his captivity, told in his own words, but it is also a startlingly frank discussion about the state of a world redefined by clashing civilizations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

ok

Interesting account and perspective on kidnappings by jihadist groups. The story is told first as the hostage perspective and then overlays what wasnhappening in negotiations. It gives a good food for thought on the hostage/ kidnapping management/negociations policies of States and more generally on the war on terror.

You can really empathize with Robert through his saga. It felt like a true insight to what it would be like to be in his situation. Something I think we all ask ourselves and think about when you hear of harrowing kidnappings in the media. Whether Somali pirates, or Jihadi fundamentalists It always amazes me how long they last, months, many times years. Some with a happier outcomes, many not. As Robert mentions in the book we all ask ourselves 'how would we fair', 'ho would we cope'. I feel this book give us a glimpse.

The subject is disturbing and I didn't think I would finish the book, but once I started reading I had trouble putting it down. Kidnapping is hardly the stuff of a good read, yet Robert Fowler skillfully describes his traumatic experience in a straightforward, direct and honest manner.I recommend this book for many reasons: the subject matter, the description of the kidnapping and the captors, the physical geography of the region, and the political, religious and social implications for all of us.

Great first hand account of a terrible event. Thank you for sharing your pain.

I made a note to wait to read this book until after I'd returned from Northern Nigeria.I'm glad I did.Its a very readable and informative book.It was nothing like my time in Northern Nigeria, which was because thankfully I had no contact with Al Quada

Robert Fowler's skilfully composed account of his four-month ordeal in northern Mali with Louis Guay in 2009 doesn't so much leap off the page as grab you by the ears and haul you in. I read it over a weekend because here at last is a lucid, thoughtful and honest description of an experience about which many wonder: `how would I cope?'. And before the first page is turned Fowler answers that question: `better than you'd assume'.Thankfully, a lazy Day 1, Day 2... diary format is avoided. Instead, events or themes are covered over the pair's months `en brousse', while fending off the malice, provocations and mind games of their captors, as well as navigating their own inevitable mood swings. Some like to dismiss AQIM and similar groups as mere criminals enriching themselves from smuggling and kidnapping. If that's the case then Fowler's abductors, led by Moktar bel Moktar (`MBM', who went on to organise the deadly gas plant raid in Algeria in 2013) put up a convincing performance refuting that. It may have only been driven by competitive piety, but all of the ragged jihadists tried to convert the two diplomats to Islam while at `Camp Canada'. Vigorous religious debates dominated the gang's discussions, rather than which Rolex they'll buy with their share of the loot.Throughout this episode Fowler and Guay were put to the test, but both astutely

deployed their had-won diplomatic nous to help lessen their misery, as well as using other methods to maintain morale. One topic I thought oddly absent was any obsessive discussion over food. Some emotionally sensitive subjects were proscribed, but you'd think the harmless pleasure in food fantasies would be fun.After months of hesistant negotiations, unexpected gifts, hurried relocations and calls home, somewhere in the desert the two Canadians are finally handed over to shady mediators. With them are two desperately emaciated European women, kidnapped by a rival gang whose brutal leader is deeply unsatisfied with the settlement. In a tense denouement the two AQIM emirs face each other down, but MBM prevails. The jeeps speed south towards diplomatically staged photo calls, long-overdue ablutions and happy family reunions. The book ends with a warning that action must be taken against the scourge then besetting northern Mali (in January 2013 the French led Operation Serval invaded the area). There's also an unapologetic swipe at the way the RCMP handled Fowler and Guay's abduction.For some the elephant in the room is the matter of ransom payment - denied by the Canadian government. Fowler says he was kept in the dark but elucidates in appropriately equivocal terms: `... there tends also to be a difference between what governments do and what they say, and this seems to me quite reasonable... Many countries adopt what are more or less pragmatic approaches while others proclaim immutable doctrine, but I know for certain that everybody has blinked at one time or another...'Wikileaks since revealed that AQIM prisoners were released and 700,000 paid, thus prolonging the scourge. The conduit for the cash was the then convenient treasury of Ghadafi's Libya, in return for unspecified concessions.It's sometimes thought that publicity bans are put on freed Saharan hostages (nearly 100 in the last decade) by their governments; perhaps a condition for covering the usually denied ransoms. If that was the case with Robert Fowler, he ignored it. `A Season in Hell' illustrates his desert captivity in vivid detail, including as far as they could gather, the motivations of the people who abducted them. It might even be read as a manual on how to cope with such an experience. However you choose to take it, it's highly recommend. (Long version with more background at deserttravels.wordpress.com).

A season in Hellby Robert FowlerRobert Fowler has written a unique account of what it is to be a captive of Al Queda. Unique, because Fowler is the highest-level representative of western governments ever to be taken by Al Queda. Also, because his background as a diplomat, senior government official and UN representative was precisely keyed to the menace of islamist terrorism; he knows his subject.Fowler, together with his colleague Louis Guay, was sent as the official representative of the UN Secretary General to encourage peace talks between the rebel Taureg

movement and the government of Niger. He soon realized that this was a 'Mission impossible' - not because the rebels were not ready to deal, but because the government of Niger was exploiting the rebel problem to maintain its hold on power.The book explains in painful detail the treatment he was subjected to for four months in the Sahara desert, the motivation of his radicalized captors and the perfidious actions - as well as the heroics - of the various actors involved. Fowler `gets' the big picture, and explains it in terms that provide a wake-up call to both the threatened governments of the Sahel region and the western governments that must support them.Many books have been written by and about kidnap victims; this victim has survived to tell the tale in terms that are alarming and informative, but in the end a credit to the best instincts of survival.

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