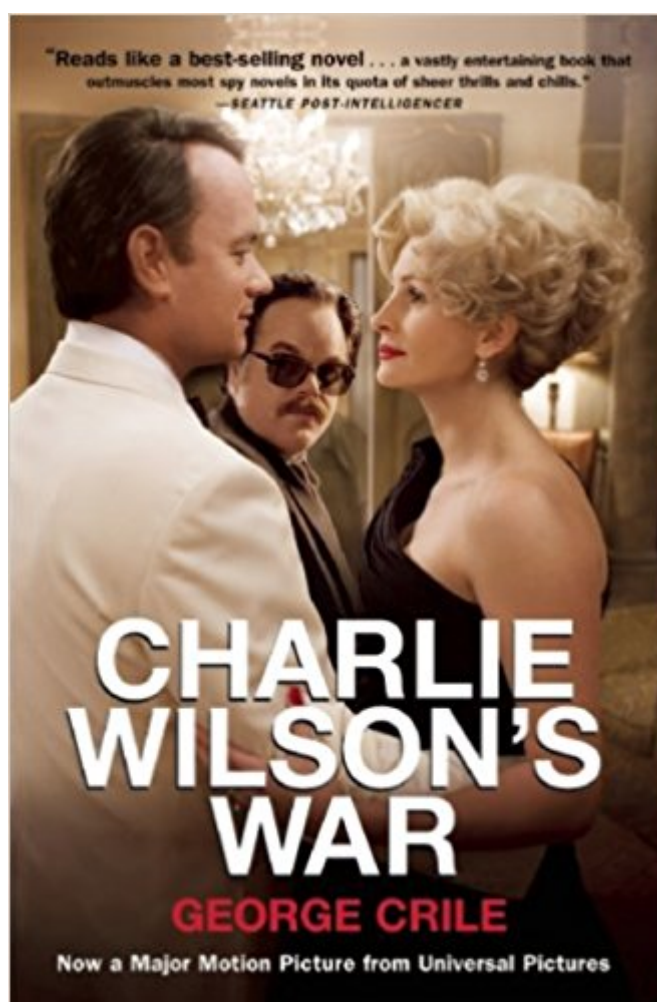


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# Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story Of How The Wildest Man In Congress And A Rogue CIA Agent Changed The History Of Our Times





## Synopsis

It's common knowledge that the U.S. armed the Afghans in their fight against the Soviet Union, but until now, the fact that this was possibly the biggest, meanest covert operation in history has been absent from press reports. In one of the most detailed descriptions of a CIA operation every written, the bizarre twists and turns of the full story are told in CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR. Veteran 60 Minutes producer George Crile explains how one Congressman was able to provide the CIA with hundreds of millions of dollars to fund the Afghan program, dwarfing the price tag for arming the Nicaraguan Contras that occurred at virtually the same time. "The scope and nature of this campaign has still not registered in the consciousness of most Americans," Crile writes in the book's Epilogue. "Nor is it understood that such secret undertakings inevitably have unforeseen and unintended consequences which, in this case, remain largely ignored." When Crile produced his first story about Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson for 60 Minutes in 1989, he too underestimated the vastness of the program and its consequences. It was a later trip to the Arab world with Wilson, the Wilson's "princely" reception, and the events of 9/11 that opened his eyes to the far bigger picture of CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR. Among the book's more startling revelations: By the latter years of the 1980s the CIA was not just providing arms to a half million Afghans, it had taken 150,000 of them and transformed them into what it called a force of "techno holy warriors." "From today's perspective," Crile observes, "that may seem more than a bit ill advised-particularly when you factor in the specialized training in urban warfare that the Agency sponsored to include the use of pipe bombs, bicycle bombs, car bombs, camel bombs, along with a host of other tactics to wreak havoc with the army of a modern superpower." The United States continued to fund the Afghan rebels long after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union. Incredibly, the subsidies continued despite the fact that one of the most important mujahid leaders sided with Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War. In addition to \$200 million in aid from the U.S. and \$200 million from Saudi Arabia, in 1991 and 1992 the rebels received Iraqi weapons captured by U.S. forces during the Gulf War. At the same time, the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The Cold War was effectively over but what began as a war against Communism was continuing to be funded. "The question that has puzzled so many Americans: 'Why do they hate us?' is not so difficult to understand if you put yourself into the shoes of the Afghan veterans in the aftermath of the Soviet departure," Crile says. To them, the real superpower in their struggle was Allah. The United States eventually cut off its support in the 1990s. In the Afghan's minds, Allah did not. CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR is nothing short of a critical missing chapter in our political consciousness. Without a clear understanding of its impact, it may be impossible to comprehend the two world changing events that

shook the United States on either side of the millennium: the sudden and mysterious collapse of the Soviet Union and the equally inexplicable appearance of a new global foe in the form of militant Islam. At its core, it tells of an unorthodox alliance-of a scandal-prone Texas Congressman named Charlie Wilson and an out-of-favor CIA operative named Gust Avrakotos-that armed and sustained the Afghan jihad and turned Afghanistan into the Soviet Union's Vietnam."The origins of this book go back to a time when the Afghans were viewed by most everyone in the U.S. government as freedom fighters and allies against a common foe," Crile writes in the Epilogue. In 1988, Crile produced a 60 Minutes profile of Wilson that he now realizes barely scratched the surface of this fascinating story. Later, while, accompanying Wilson on a trip to Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan just prior to the first Gulf War, Crile was amazed at the "princely" reception accorded Wilson in the Arab world. "The trip was just the beginning of a decade-long odyssey uncovering the many dimensions of the CIA's Afghan War," he recalls. "In short order I realized that it had been anything but a typical CIA program."As incredible as anything in the pages of Tom Clancy or John le CarrÃ©, CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR is a gripping story of international intrigue, booze, drugs, sex, high society and arms deals. Between its covers, we meet:

- The charismatic Congressman Charlie Wilson. While Ronald Reagan and William Casey were unable to persuade Congress to fund the Nicaraguan Contras, Wilson was procuring hundreds of millions of dollars to support his Afghan "freedom fighters" through back-room machinations that would have made even LBJ blush. A colorful man of many contradictions, he worked hard and played hard, earning the reputation as the "wildest man in Congreeeeeess" while representing an archconservative Bible-belt district in Texas.
- The out-of-favor CIA operative, Gust Avrakotos, whose working-class Greek-American background made him an anomaly in the patrician world of American spies. Nicknamed "Dr. Dirty", this blue collar James Bond was an aggressive agent who served on the front lines of the Cold War where he learned how to stretch the Agency's rules to the breaking point.
- The eccentric staff of CIA outcasts hand-picked by Avrakotos to run the operation. Among them were "Hilly Billy", the logistics wizard who could open an un-numbered Swiss bank account for the U.S. government in 12 hours when others took months; Art Alper, the "devilish" tinkerer from the Technical Services division who roamed the world creating such novelties as exploding typewriters and developed portable amplifiers that spread propaganda among the Soviet troops; and especially Mike Vickers, the former Green Beret so junior in status that he couldn't send his own cables. His military genius allowed him to single-handedly redesign the CIA's war plan. Through his highly specific blueprint, he created a systematic plan that turned a rabble of shepherds and tribesmen into an army of techno Holy warriors who gave the legendary

Red Army their greatest defeat. Today, Mike Vickers is consulting for the Pentagon on the War on Terrorism and war planning for Iraq. The many women who shared the Congressman's jihad. It all began with a Houston socialite, Joanne Herring who enlisted Wilson to the Afghan cause via her deep-seated hatred of Communism and her influence in Pakistan. Carol Shannon, Wilson's personal belly dancer who he took with him to the jihad. Charlie's Angels, Wilson's female staffers so strikingly beautiful that they became a legend on Capitol Hill. And finally, Annelise Illschenko, aka "Sweetums", the former U.S. representative in the Miss World competition who traveled with Wilson deep into the Islamic world in outfits that were not the most appropriate attire in the eyes of Muslim men; The Pakistani dictator Zia ul Haq, who early on realized that the way to millions of dollars in American aid was through Charlie Wilson and his covert war in Afghanistan. A dictator whom many held personally responsible for the execution of his democratically elected predecessor, Zia used his favorable status as an ally of the U.S. against the Soviets to divert attention from his own nuclear weapons program while providing the all-important safe haven and operations center for the CIA's Afghan operations. CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR is the CIA and Congress as they have never been seen before, engaged in the last great battle of the Cold War. This is a book that has direct implications for today's world situation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Put the Tom Clancy clones back on the shelf; this covert-ops chronicle is practically impossible to put down. No thriller writer would dare invent Wilson, a six-feet-four-inch Texas congressman, liberal on social issues but rabidly anti-Communist, a boozier, engaged in serial affairs and wheeler-dealer

of consummate skill. Only slightly less improbable is Gust Avrakotos, a blue-collar Greek immigrant who joined the CIA when it was an Ivy League preserve and fought his elitist colleagues almost as ruthlessly as he fought the Soviet Union in the Cold War's waning years. In conjunction with President Zia of Pakistan in the 1980s, Wilson and Arvakotos circumvented most of the barriers to arming the Afghan mujahideen—distance, money, law and internal CIA politics, to name a few. Their coups included getting Israeli-modified Chinese weapons smuggled into Afghanistan, with the Pakistanis turning a blind eye, and the cultivation of a genius-level weapons designer and strategist named Michael Vickers, a key architect of the guerrilla campaign that left the Soviet army stymied. The ultimate weapon in Afghanistan was the portable Stinger anti-aircraft missile, which eliminated the Soviet's Mi-24 helicopter gunships and began the train of events leading to the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and its satellites. A triumph of ruthless ability over scruples, this story has dominated recent history in the form of blowback: many of the men armed by the CIA became the Taliban's murderous enforcers and Osama bin Laden's protectors. Yet superb writing from Crile, a 60 Minutes producer, will keep even the most vigorous critics of this Contra-like affair reading to the end. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A longtime Sixty Minutes producer investigates the expenditure of what eventually amounted to \$1 billion a year to support Afghanistan's Mujahideen in their battle against the Soviets. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

History books, especially those with an emphasis on investigative journalism, are rarely fun to read. Many are about obscure topics, long dead people, or written in a dry and objective manner. Not so with this modern classic from reporter George Crile. The title refers to Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson, and his efforts in funding the US aid to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan during the 1980's. The book is part biography of Democrat Charlie Wilson, part history of the Afghan war effort, and part policy review of the roles played by various US agencies during the 1980's involvement in Afghanistan. Told in chronological fashion, the author shows how Wilson's career and life came to be defined by his association with the mujahedeen and their struggle. The hedonistic Wilson was a lightweight in terms of domestic legislation, was not a strong party organizer, and did not have the gravitas to become a party spokesman... But upon meeting Texas socialite Joanne Herring, who sold him on the dire needs of the Afghans, Wilson used all his effort and skill and personal charisma

and that of some of his female associates, to galvanize US support for the mujahedeen, and their enablers in Pakistan. Through Wilson's machinations, the book lays out the interplay between US foreign policy, and those of Israel, Pakistan, Egypt, and other countries in the front line of the Cold War during the 1980's. The author describes numerous episodes where Wilson was the conduit for approving various military and civilian aid packages for these countries... all as quid pro quo for helping supply the Afghans with material in their resistance against the Soviets...The author also shows the various flaws in Wilson's life, and examining how some of his personal mistakes nearly cost him his role in helping the Afghans, if not his Congressional seat. These include a hit-and-run episode while drunk, numerous affairs, a purported party with marijuana, bringing scantily clad women into deeply conservative Muslim lands, etc... The book also shows how things "get done" in our political system, with a lot of wink of an eye, backroom intimidations, and outright law-breaking. And best of all, the book brings forth Wilson's life and achievements in an easy to read manner, with numerous lines that caused me to laugh out loud. Normally, I would give a book of this quality and entertainment value 5/5 stars... however I am leaving off the 5th star because it leaves out two crucial facts of this entire episode in world history. First, the entire premise of Wilson's involvement, which the book states again and again, is that the Soviets entered Afghanistan unprovoked. This is fundamentally incorrect, as President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski would reveal in a 2003 interview to French newspaper La Monde. The US had begun sending arms and funds to the most violent and reactionary elements of Afghan society in the late 1970's...overseen by the CIA. This triggered political chaos in Afghanistan that would draw in the Soviets, as hoped by the Carter administration. Second, the book minimizes the impact of the Afghan War on the international heroin and opium trade, which Western banks heavily profited from... These two omissions change the entire color of this episode of history, and severely lessen its tragedy. So 4/5 stars is my vote.

Excellent, shows our frigging government really works and how short sighted they really are, not to mention that the terrorist attacks we are experiencing today can be traced right back to this period not to mention that we trained and supplied them. There are many other books telling how the Pakistani government cheated us out of hundreds of millions of dollars still the characters were incredible in what they accomplished in the name of misguided patriotism and how F@&\$ing the CIA is. Don't get me wrong we need them but we need better people running it and less congressional interference with their own misguided agenda the CIA needs a watch dog but it should be a panel of independent thinkers from the American people who are carefully screened and with

no agenda except to uphold the constitution

Charlie Wilson, a tall smiling Texan, was not so much a Congressman, but a hedonist sitting in Congress. Loyal to the Democratic credo of big government, and trusted by Tip O'Neill, then House Speaker, he drank gargantuan quantities of liquor, bedded beautiful women, survived an investigation into cocaine use, and unbelievably, became the single most important advocate in America for the Afghan rebels, recognizing how bound and determined they were to thrust the Soviets out of their country. In part, he looked upon his mission as a payback for Vietnam, evening up the score, so to speak. Aided by a rebellious rogue of a CIA agent, Gust Avarakos who was steeped in the Greek culture of manhood and who headed much of the strategic planning and weapons procurement, he pushed millions of dollars almost clandestinely, through Congress to achieve what became his principal objective in life, the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan. After drinking and schtupping, of course. Our boy never went on a trip to the region without a lady to hold, although whatever woman he was with had to pretend she was virginal while in Muslim countries like Pakistan. Religion however, did not prevent the Egyptian Defense Minister from being enthralled by Charlie's uh, personal belly dancer. The story is serious and zany all at the same time, as if it were written in equal parts by Joseph Heller, Larry McMurtry and the great military historian, Victor Davis Hanson. What became Wilson's obsession led to the withdrawal of the Soviets, and ultimately, was an important nail in the coffin of the Evil Empire.

I had been wanting to read this book ever since I saw the movie. Like most Hollywood efforts, the film doesn't come close to doing justice to the full story behind Charlie Wilson's single-minded campaign to bring down the Soviet Union's 40th Army that invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. The author expertly takes the reader through Wilson's campaign within Congress to fund the mujahideen freedom fighters. He also tells how CIA agent Gust Avrakotos became an integral figure in bringing the agency around to supporting Wilson's war. The epilogue is especially enlightening and well worth the time to read. It clarifies so much of what America has come to discover about the dangers of an armed and militant Islamic movement.

It is almost too cliché to say it, but the book is way better than the movie - and I really liked the movie! Charlie Wilson has to be one of the great characters in modern US history and it was a delight to read about his exploits. I can see why Hollywood decided it was worth making a movie about this guy and what he accomplished. Truly an outstanding read and a fascinating story, all the



more so for being true. If, like me, you saw the movie and are wondering whether it's worth it to get the book, let me tell you it is definitely worth it. There is so much more detail in the book and all of it is worth knowing.

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