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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



Synopsis

Charlie Wilson's War was a publishing sensation and a New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times bestseller. In the early 1980s, a Houston socialite turned the attention of maverick Texas congressman Charlie Wilson to the ragged band of Afghan "freedom fighters" who continued, despite overwhelming odds, to fight the Soviet invaders. Wilson, who sat on the all-powerful House Appropriations Committee, managed to procure hundreds of millions of dollars to support the mujahideen. The arms were secretly procured and distributed with the help of an out-of-favor CIA operative, Gust Avrokotos, whose working-class Greek-American background made him an anomaly among the Ivy League world of American spies. Avrakotos handpicked a staff of CIA outcasts to run his operation and, with their help, continually stretched the Agency's rules to the breaking point. Moving from the back rooms of the Capitol, to secret chambers at Langley, to arms-dealers' conventions, to the Khyber Pass, this book presents an astonishing chapter of our recent past, and the key to understanding what helped trigger the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and ultimately led to the emergence of a brand-new foe in the form of radical Islam.

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Customer Reviews

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 payoff 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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