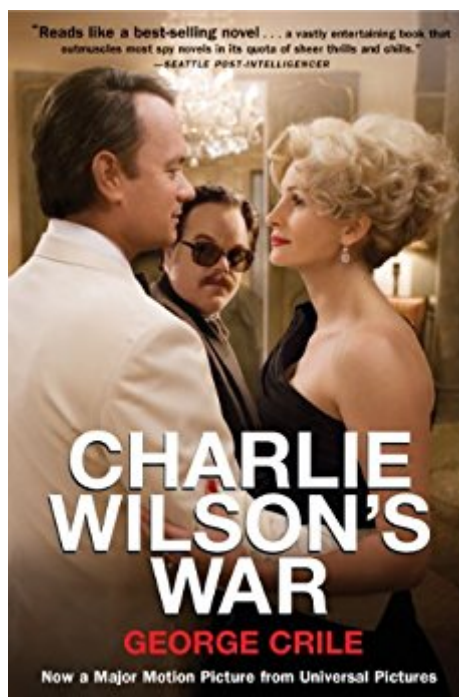


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Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story Of How The Wildest Man In Congress And A Rogue CIA Agent Changed The History



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

There is an excerpt on the cover of "Charlie Wilson's War" from Dan Rather stating "Tom Clancy's fiction pales in comparison..." Remarkably enough, that isn't hyperbole. Author George Crile delivers a compulsively readable and endlessly intriguing narrative of the CIA covert operation - the "largest and most successful covert operation ever" he incessantly reminds us - in support of the Afghan Mujahideen in the early- and mid-1980s. On one level, this book is phenomenal. It is entertaining without end. The characters are so eccentric and their activities so pregnant with danger and political scandal that it almost stretches the bounds of believability. Tom Hanks, that most venerable of Hollywood icons, has purchased the screen rights to this book and plans to play the lead. For once, screenwriters won't have to "punch up" the script to appeal to the mainstream audience (although they still might try). But that brings us to the other, more disappointing side of "Charlie Wilson's War." It is written in the spirit of a great spy novel, rather than the most exciting history imaginable. The topic is historical and the events described by Crile are all ostensibly historical in nature, but this book isn't "history." Stellar works of modern history - such as Alistair Horne's "A Savage War of Peace" or Stanley Karnow's "Vietnam" - are informative, engaging but above all objective. Grand characters may populate the narrative and some may come off better than others, but ultimately the story tells itself and the reader is left to draw their own conclusions and character analysis. This isn't the case with "Charlie Wilson's War."

When Charlie Wilson first learned that the Afghanistan soldiers, courageous fighters, were dying in large numbers and losing the war due to lack of an anti-aircraft gun which would shoot down the Hind helicopter, Charlie Wilson made it his goal and mission to supply these courageous warriors with such a weapon. The book does a superb job of detailing how this U.S. Senator became friends with powerful Israeli allies, Egyptian arms dealers, Pakistani President Zia al Huq who secretly helped the Afghanistan warriors, and with Gust Avrakotos, a C.I.A. agent with a checkered past. Wilson met Avratokos soon after he became the acting chief of the South Asia Operations Group, right about the time Wilson made it his mission to increase arms to the Afghani mujahideen. It was this partnership which sealed the deal to increase funds for the Afghanistan war and provide the weapons the warriors needed against the Soviet high tech helicopters and equipment. Gust Avratokos hired Mike Vickers, a low level C.I.A. agent, who demonstrated extraordinary knowledge of Soviet weapons and also an uncanny precise ability to strategize military tactics, weapons, and guerilla maneuvers against them. Due to Vickers skills, Charlie Wilson's plans were becoming aligned with reality. George Crile does an amazing job of detailing how politics, human relations, world events and just plain luck can collide and melt creating the right outcome. This book helps the

reader understand how very complex current world events really are, and that sometimes, the most astonishing interplay of unexpected elements can bring about success, despite the odds against them. The film "Charlie Wilson's War" is good and is recommended but it is highly selective in its contents and therefore superficial compared to the book.

"Charlie Wilson's War" is the unbelievable yet true story of the covert CIA operation to support the Afghan rebels who so courageously resisted Soviet occupation in the 1980's. It is also the story of two extraordinary men, Congressman Charles Wilson and CIA operative Gust Avrokotos, whose guile, determination, and utter disregard for the rules made this quixotic undertaking a reality. This book is about impossible personalities prevailing against impossible odds to defeat an impossible foe. It is also impossible to put down. The prose is quick and engaging. George Crile and his crack team drop you immediately into the action, creating a close bond with the book's main protagonists. However, Wilson and Avrokotos are not allowed to completely overshadow the action. Crile brings his expert eye to this historic tale, forged after almost two decades of service as an executive producer at "Sixty Minutes". The result is an easy to follow, orderly read- despite the utter chaos of the region's history, politics, and religious, ethnic, and territorial turmoil. What makes this book all the more fascinating is the direct connections Crile ties to our present day difficulties with Afghanistan and the larger Islamic world, not to mention the final days of the Soviet empire. For the first time since 9/11, one source ties together the complicated web of covert operations, David and Goliath type odds, and the final missed opportunities into a coherent story. A story that is an object lesson into our current relationships in the Middle East.

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