

Charlie Wilson's War by George Crile

Synopsis

'This book is the story of the biggest and most successful CIA campaign in history. It's the story of how the United States turned the tables on the Soviet Union and did to them in Afghanistan what they had done to the US in Vietnam. The operation certainly contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union...the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Red Army's defeat at the hands of the CIA-backed Afghan rebels was a world-changing event. And what makes it all the more unusual is that at the heart of this drama is the story of two men, Charlie Wilson and Gust Avrakotos, and what they did in the shadows of the US government.' P6

'Neither Congressman Wilson nor the CIA's Avrakotos considered their efforts to be evil or treacherous. By their lights they were doing God's work as true patriots... As to the illegal aspects, both acknowledge with pride they joyfully broke the rules with abandon to achieve their daring goals.' P6

'Most of Congress is about words and debating, and you can never really resolve anything. But Appropriations is simply about money and it's very practical.' Denis Neill, lobbyist. P482

Introduction: A Strange Award at Langley

CIA Headquarters

1993 – Charlie Wilson, 60 year old congressman heads off to Langley, CIA headquarters, to receive a special award. It is conferred on him by CIA director Jim Woolsey and Frank Anderson, Near East Division chief in front of an audience of a hundred CIA staff.

Frank Anderson's speech: 'This moment is about elitism. Within the Clandestine Services we are a self-proclaimed elite unit called the Near East Division. It is an organisation whose greatest weakness is hubris. One of the things about elites is that they only care about the approbation of the members of their own elites. So within the division we created an Honoured Colleague award, something never before presented to anyone outside the service.'

Incongruity of the award

'It was a strange sensation for the congressman who had first come to the attention of this institution eleven years before as a virtual public outlaw – a seemingly corrupt, cocaine-snorting, scandal-prone womaniser who, the CIA was convinced, could only get the Agency into terrible trouble if it permitted him to become involved in any way its operations.' P3

Gust Avrakotos

Gust Avrakotos also attends, wryly looking on as Charlie Wilson gets the glory. 'The grey man, so used to operating in the shadows, recognised that once again he would have to sit back and let Charlie take the honours for both of them.'

Chapter One: a Hot Tub in Las Vegas

Scene in Las Vegas

June 27 1980. Congressman Charlie Wilson sets off for a weekend in Las Vegas to promote the chances of a fund-raiser's attractive daughter landing a film part, and to meet the potential backer of a *Dallas*-type TV show that Wilson has sunk his savings into.

He ends up in a Jacuzzi in a suite at Caesar's Palace hotel with two beautiful women and liberal amounts of cocaine. The episode, investigated by the FBI, almost ended his career. He survived.

Background on Charlie Wilson's character

- Wilson had never been able to shake the politician's impulse to take centre stage

- He looked like a millionaire but, after eight years in the Texas legislature and almost as many in the House, he had nothing to show for his efforts but debt and a \$70,000 government salary
- He'd become a master at getting others to pick up the tab for his lavish lifestyle
- He had a genius for getting people to judge him not as a middle-aged scoundrel, but as if he were a good-hearted adolescent, guilty of little more than youthful excess
- He had a drinking problem he mostly concealed by being a very capable and genial drunk
- 'Why should I go around looking like a constipated hound dog? I'm having the time of my life'
- It was hard not to conclude that this 47-year-old recently divorced congressman was a man in free fall, programmed for disaster

Political situation in 1980

- Fifty hostages still being kept prisoner in Teheran, the rescue mission is a disaster, watched on TV
- 'Vietnam syndrome' had infected the spirit of America according to some
- Many conservatives, led by Reagan, warned that Soviet Union had achieved nuclear superiority
- Many claimed the KGB had infiltrated most Western intelligence services
- President Jimmy Carter vows and succeeds in putting an end to the decades of CIA's dirty tricks
- Soviets invade Afghanistan which radicalises Carter who declares the invasion 'the greatest foreign policy crisis confronting the United States since WWII'
- Americans boycott the Moscow Olympics in 1980
- Carter, even more radicalised, signs a series of secret legal documents, 'Presidential Findings', authorising the CIA to go into action against the Red Army
- Carter gets Pakistan's president Mohammed Zia ul-Haq to use his country as a base for secret operations, but has to go through Zia's intelligence service for weapons distribution
- Carter believes the secret action to arm mujahideen will warn Soviets not to make further moves toward Persian Gulf or Pakistan; and make friends with Islamic nations who had scorned the US for its support of Israel and the Shah of Iran
- CIA thinks that the Afghan rebel mujahideen have no hope against Soviet 40th Army
- Soviets think otherwise, remembering Afghan history of resistance and torture of captured enemies
- Millions of refugees start leaving Afghanistan for the border with Pakistan and Iran

Triggers to Charlie Wilson's involvement

60 Minutes news reporter Dan Rather sneaks across border into the war zone from Pakistan to report on what is an already waning news story. His conclusions: the CIA's support to the Afghans was almost meaningless. The mujahideen were facing Soviet tanks and flying gunships with World War I rifles and little ammunition.

Dan Rather is a fellow Texan, and Charlie Wilson was stunned by his report seeing the plight of the mujahideen. 'What caught Wilson's attention was the reporter's conclusion that the Afghan warriors were refusing to quit... Against all odds, there was a growing rebellion under way against the Red Army. It reminded Wilson of fellow Texans' stand at the battle of the Alamo. P19

Once again his president (Carter) was failing to stand up to the test of history. Given the false hope of meaningful US support, there seemed to be nothing in the future for these anti-communist freedom fighters but defeat. P18

Charlie Wilson's action

No one was paying attention when Charlie Wilson picked up a phone and called the Appropriations Committee staffer who dealt with 'black appropriations', the CIA funds. The man's name was Jim Van Wagenen, a former college professor and onetime FBI agent. Wilson had just been named to the Defence Appropriations subcommittee. He was now part of the band of twelve men in the House responsible for funding CIA operations.

The congressman knew enough about the eccentric workings of the subcommittee to know when a member can act alone to fund a program.

'How much are we giving the Afghans?' he asked Van Wagenen.

'Five million,' said the staffer.

There was a moment's silence. 'Double it,' said the Texan.

Chapter Two: Defender of Trinity

The Two Charlie Wilsons

'The truth is there were always two Charlie Wilsons at work in Washington. But he was moving heaven and earth in those days to allow only one image to surface, and to promote it so loudly that no one would go looking for the other.' p22

Charlie Wilson was a bona fide hedonist with a Hugh Hefner-style condo; he staffed his office with tall, startlingly beautiful women called 'Charlie's Angels'. But he was also a serious student of military history. And as an insomniac, would spend hours reading the biographies and speeches of great leaders.

Childhood in Trinity, Texas

Wilson grew up in a small conservative town in Trinity, Texas where his father was the accountant at the timber company and later a roads supervisor. His mother was the town liberal, a force to be reckoned with. She instilled in Wilson the need to always champion the underdog, as she did for the black community in their town.

Wilson was obsessed with Winston Churchill, defending the tiny town against the Japanese during the war (he was eight when Pearl Harbour was attacked) and being a patriot. [It was] 'just the beginning of a lifetime fascination with war, weapons, public service' and his place in history. P25

'When Churchill came to America in 1947 and warned of an 'iron curtain' falling over Europe, Charlie took his words to heart, and when the Communists tested the bomb, Wilson was depressed for days, convinced that America had a new enemy every bit as dangerous as Hitler.' P25

Naval Career

Charlie's father lobbied for him to get accepted into the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. He graduated in 1956, eighth from bottom of his class and with the distinction of having more demerits than any other graduate in anyone's memory. He missed the Korean War, but at twenty-five, became a gunnery officer on a destroyer, sailing the world with the American fleet at the height of the Cold War.

'Patrolling the seas during those Cold War years, Wilson became personally to feel the menace and reach of Soviet power' p27. And it became a lifelong obsession to bring down this evil power. P28

After three years at sea chasing Russian submarines, Wilson was assigned to a top secret post at the Pentagon, where he was part of an intelligence unit evaluating the Soviet Union's nuclear forces.' P28

Early political career

Jack Kennedy launched his campaign for the presidency, and after work each day, hours spent studying the Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile threat, Wilson would rush from the Pentagon to the Kennedy campaign headquarters where he volunteered. Like so many of his generation, Wilson became caught up in the aura of romance that Kennedy lent to public service. P28

It's not legal for active-duty servicemen to campaign for public office, but Wilson decided to disregard that detail, took 30 days leave from the Navy and entered his name in the race for Texas state representative. He won, despite getting caught for drunk driving and being a rogue during the campaign.

In 1961 at the age of 27 he resigned from the Navy and was sworn into office in Austin, Texas; the same month Kennedy became president.

Wilson's bond with his constituents

'Charlie won, demonstrating the intuitive understanding of and bond with his Bible Belt constituents that would allow him to hold onto their support through the many scandals that lay ahead. Unlike other politicians, Wilson never tried to hide his failings from his constituents. In fact, he seemed almost to turn his innocent sins to his advantage. Time and again it seemed that the voters of the Second Congressional District would forgive him almost anything if he was honest with them. What they hated was hypocrisy, and Wilson was no hypocrite. There was perhaps another reason why the dour, supposedly puritanical voters chose to make Charlie Wilson their representative: the Second District can

be a deadly boring place expect when Charlie was there. People couldn't help but like and forgive this boyish politician who always made them feel good whenever he entered a room.' P29

Middle political career

- 1960s and 1970s he served East Texas, always on lookout to do something for his country
- 1973 he went to Washington
- He won a seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee and discovered the cause of Israel

Israel Engagement

- 1973: Became obsessed with trying to help the Israelis despite not being a Jew nor having Jews in his district; was championed by the Israeli embassy in Washington who flew him out to see the war first hand accompanied by another representative Ed Koch
- It was the beginning of a ten-year love affair with everything to do with Israel. 'I bought the whole thing – the beleaguered democracy surrounded by Soviet-armed barbarians – survivors of Nazi concentration camps – David versus Goliath' P31
- Gust Avrakotos suggested Wilson had a James Bond syndrome: a Communist bully to put down and a beautiful woman by his side. [Wilson] 'I remember thinking this is a hell of a place. You get Russian tanks burning in the desert, beautiful Army captains and movie stars.' To Wilson, Israel was filled with nothing but glorious underdogs who didn't want or need Americans to fight their wars for them. All they were asking for was US military supplies and economic assistance, to counter the Arabs who wanted nothing less than to use their Soviet arsenals to annihilate Israel' P32
- As a result, Jews of Houston and Dallas began bankrolling his re-election campaigns, and Ed Koch helped mobilise his campaign in 1984, when a typical Wilson drug scandal threatened his chances of re-election. Jews of New York and backers from Israel paid his campaign funds
- The Jews in Congress also rallied to put Wilson on the all-powerful Appropriations Committee where he could help make sure the \$3billion in aid to Israel continued to flow

Discovery about Appropriations Committee powers

'Wilson began to learn how Israel and other special interests used their power. He discovered that the authorising committees, like Foreign Affairs, were little more than debating societies. He now served on a committee that doles out the nation's money: fifty men appropriating \$500 billion a year. He watched and saw how one man, if he's on the right subcommittee and knows how to play the system, can move the entire nation to fund a programme of cause of his choice. P33

Nicaragua Engagement

- By the late 1970s Wilson was starting to feel his power. He had become part of a small tribe of Democrats alarmed at what they perceived as a policy of appeasement by their own party P33
- Met Congressman Jack Murphy who claimed Carter was about to betray America's oldest anti-Communist ally in Central America and thought Wilson was the only man in Congress with the power and balls (as part of the Appropriations committee) to stop it P34
- Murphy was school and college mates with Somoza, the Nicaraguan dictator. He claimed Somoza was always an ally of America and now needed help; Wilson zealously took up the cause
- The Appropriations subcommittee had already sent the bill that cut Somoza's funding to the House floor. The unwritten rules of the Appropriations Committee dictate that members don't challenge the overall subcommittee bill once they have been reported out
- Wilson took the Nicaraguan-aid issue to the floor and threatened to scuttle the president's entire foreign-aid bill if Somoza's money was not restored. Amazingly he won; to the disgust of liberals, the media and the administration. Somoza got his \$3.1m aid package
- Wilson and his cohort Murphy flew to Managua to be feted by Somoza who threw them a lavish meal. Privately, Somoza tried to pay Wilson \$50,000 as a thank you, and Wilson was appalled
- Wilson then fell under the spell of the famous *Heart of Darkness* former CIA agent Ed Wilson who involved Charlie Wilson in a plot to save Somoza who was increasingly under threat from Ortega
- Scene at the Palm Bay Club in Miami Beach with Somoza, his mistress, Wilson, his mistress and Ed Wilson which ended in a mistress / Somoza cat fight, and Somoza turning down CIA dirty money to save himself and his army
- Somoza fled Nicaragua in 1979, is shot to death in Paraguay; Murphy is jailed for taking a bribe in an FBI sting operation and Ed Wilson imprisoned in the Bahamas for illegal dealings with Libya's Qaddafi

- Charlie Wilson escapes unscathed but unsettled – his heart was in the right place but his head was not
- He slips into the ‘longest midlife crisis in history’ until the mujahideen in Afghanistan awaken his patriotic fervour again

Chapter Three: A Rogue Elephant in the Agency Woods

Background on Gust Avrakotos

- Son of Greek immigrants from Aliquippa, Pennsylvania
- Always felt a bit like the poor street kid, nose against the glass, looking in at the party, knowing he would never be asked in. Or in his words ‘Almost everyone was a fucking blue blood in the CIA in 1961 when I came in. They were just beginning to let Jews move up that year. But there still weren’t any blacks, Hispanics, or females – just some token Greeks and Polacks.’
- Had a chip on his shoulder, but did make friends with many influential blue bloods
- Grew up in the cold war panic of Soviet nuclear assault and believed in the threat of Communism
- Avrakotos has never stopped using the brutal street talk of his youth
- Father owned the Apollo Soda Water Company and worked hard until he lost the business
- In the Avrakotos household, revenge was a matter of family honour
- Discovered the library and did very well at school and college until he had to leave school to pay off his father’s debts

Early Career

- Graduated with a degree in mathematics and was lured first by IBM and then the CIA
- Avrakotos was hooked by the idea of becoming a spy for America and joined in 1962
- The majority of the intake that year were Ivy Leaguers, the rest street-kids with brains
- Spent 18 months at Camp Peary, Virginia learning the tradecraft of spying
- CIA agents viewed themselves as global cancer surgeons trying to identify and remove even the most minor malignancies, less they grow into full scale threats that might later precipitate a nuclear confrontation
- His first overseas post was back to Greece to be ‘a watchman on the walls of freedom’
- There were already 142 agents in place in Athens and Avrakotos was an irrepressible self-starter
- The colonels’ coup turned Avrakotos into one of the CIA’s indispensable frontline players; and for the next seven years, the colonels insisted on dealing with Avrakotos as their principal American contact... he was for all practical purposes, an invisible member of the ruling junta
- Became a target for reprisals by the 17 November terrorist group, and spent years evading assassination
- Became embroiled in internal CIA politics, calling the deputy director for operations a cocksucker. Few case officers could have gotten away with that, but Avrakotos was one of those killer operatives that every spy agency comes to depend on
- By 1977 Gust dreamed of getting to the top of the Agency, but he became disillusioned by the Watergate scandal, and the purge of staff in the CIA headquarters – all of whom seemed to be the second-generation Americans like him. He got many of them to fight back
- After 12 years in Greece, eleven coups, four attempted coups, the murder of his station chief and a thousand different dramas. He was bitter about the firing of his friends, and had just broken up with his wife. He was burned out and put in for a transfer

Middle Career

- Assigned to Boston as part of the recruitment of foreign businessmen team; and performed well
- Learned of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the idea that there was a nation of warriors in the mountains to kill Russians took seed in Avrakotos’s mind but he never imagined he nor the CIA would ever get involved.
- The CIA was in a new and gentle phase, and it did not seem likely to permit such a rude figure as Gust Avrakotos to win a spot in the Agency’s ruling elite
- After a three-year tour in Boston, Avrakotos was brought back to headquarters with a reputation as ‘Dr Dirty’, a valuable asset, but too freewheeling to be entrusted with serious responsibility

- The head of the European Division handpicked him to become station chief in Helsinki. He started language classes and was all set to leave when a new European Division head was installed, William Graver, and informed Avrakotos that the job was no longer his
- Avrakotos told the chief to go fuck himself.
- He had revered the Agency and gave it and his country every ounce of his remarkable talents and energies. Graver had hurt him in ways that went beyond the crippling of Avrakotos's career. It was almost as if he had taken away all of Gust's previous accomplishments and declared him unfit to serve anywhere in his division
- He appealed to Clair George, his Director of Operations to intervene on his behalf, Clair suggested he apologise to Graver to salvage his career. Gust went back in and told Graver, again, to go fuck himself

Chapter Four: A Texas Bombshell

Joanne Herring

- A glamorous and exotic figure of the oil-rich world of Texas in the 1970s and 80s
- Social lioness and hostess to the powerful
- Became simultaneously responsible for setting in motion a process that would profoundly impact the outcome of the Afghan war
- In the pivotal first years of the jihad, she became both matchmaker and muse to Pakistan's Muslim fundamentalist military dictator, Zia ul-Haq, as well as to the scandal-prone Charlie Wilson

Herring's link with anti Communist groups

- Her best friend in high school was Sandra Hovas (Buckets), another high-rolling Texan who married the Italian oil baron (Cullen oil fortune) Ricky di Portanova
- As debutantes, both girls had been inducted into the Minutewomen, an offshoot of the ultra right, paramilitary Minutemen. By the time they were eighteen they had become part of semi-secret national organization...so convinced of the possibility of a Communist take-over that they were organising for guerrilla warfare

Herring's professional career

- By the 1970s she was entertaining all of Houston daily with her own immensely popular television talk show, and was married to a rich oilman Bob Herring, who ran the largest natural gas company in the country
- She began travelling with him through Arab lands and met and befriended kings, sheikhs, and chiefs of intelligence
- Houston was a boomtown back then, and when kings and foreign leaders asked to visit, the State Department found it helpful to enlist the ever-enthusiastic Herring to entertain. Her parties were always magnificently overdone
- Herring soon added Anwar Sadat, King Hussein, Princess Grace, the Shah of Iran, and Adnan Khashoggi to her list of intimate new friends, all of whom were extravagantly entertained at the Herring's twenty-two room River Oaks mansion

First contact with Afghan cause

- She became close at this time to the head of the French intelligence service, the Count de Marenche, who opened her eyes to the 'master plan' being carried out against the West
- Ms Herring's future fixation on fighting the Russians in Afghanistan originated in Paris when de Marenche arranged for her and her husband to meet one of the key players in his network, the brilliant Pakistani ambassador to Washington and eventual foreign minister Sahabzada Yaqub Khan.
- At the end of the 1970s, Pakistan was a poor country and out of favour in Washington. Trying to build friendships, Yaqub Khan proposed that Bob Herring become Pakistan's honorary consul in Houston. Bob declined, but suggested his wife instead

Herring as Pakistani Honorary Consul

- Ordinary honorary consuls get drunken sailors out of jail, ship dead citizens home, and generally show the flag

- Joanne Herring acted as if she had been made a full-fledged ambassador or minister of trade, organising benefits, plunging into Pakistani villages on fact-finding missions, giving poverty-stricken Muslims inspirational talks on capitalism
- All went well until the dictator Mohammed Zia ul-Haq seized power and hanged President Bhutto
- Jimmy Carter cut off all military & economic assistance, declaring Pakistan unworthy of US aid
- Undaunted and prodded by de Marenche who told her Zia was one of only seven men standing between the free world and Communism, Herring went to Pakistan to meet him; he won her heart
- Their bond grew so strong that for a time she is said to have been Zia's most trusted American adviser, a development that Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan found alarming
- To the dismay of the foreign office, he made her Pakistan's roving ambassador to the world and even awarded her his country's highest civilian honour

Invasion of Afghanistan

- When Russia invaded Afghanistan, Zia's relationship with the US could not have been worse, nor his relationship with his honorary consul any closer. Joanne convinced Zia the invasion was a good thing as it finally declared the Russian position, this bravado was typical of her style
- Aged 48, Joanne was accustomed to seizing centre stage and refusing to let anything get her down
- She had married two men, raised two boys and worked five days a week for twelve hours a day on her TV show. She was one of the social dragons of Houston and a tireless promoter of Pakistan
- But one year into the invasion her spirits were flagging (her husband had died of cancer) and no one seemed to want to hear about Zia or Pakistan much less about Afghanistan
- Enter Charlie Wilson who 'arrived to save her life'

Charlie Wilson and Joanne Herring's romance

- Charlie understood Joanne's depression as he suffered it himself – the insomnia, the alcoholism, the asthma, the trips to the doctor, the constant loneliness. He disguised it well. No matter what his inner mood, whenever the public door opened, the darkness disappeared, replaced by the bigger-than-life, can-do Texan
- Romance between the two blossomed and Joanne went to work on Charlie about her cause. 'I knew that if he was serious about something he went all out. I'd say to Charlie, You are powerful, you are wonderful, just think what you can do'
- Charlie agreed to meet a man at her River Oaks mansion who could enlighten him on the plight of the Afghans. Joanne knew that the men had two things in common: an impulse to stand up for the underdog, mixed with a thirst for glamour and adventure

Charles Fawcett

- Joanne had received a secret message from her friend Charles Fawcett to drop everything, fly to Islamabad and together they flew into the war zone to make a film
- Fawcett grew up an orphan in South Carolina, then travelled the world on a tramp steamer and became in turn an excellent trumpeter, wrestler, ambulance driver in France, RAF pilot and member of the French Foreign Legion. At the end of the war he became a movie actor – always performing the role of the villain
- He lived in Rome and shared rooms with the penniless Baron Ricky di Portanova
- Joanne convinced di Portanova to sue the Cullen family for his share of the family fortune, and he became a fixture of Houston high society and married Joanne's best friend
- Di Portanova brought the poor Fawcett to Houston and installed him in his house and employed him
- Aged 60, Fawcett was restless and declared to Joanne he wanted to fly to Afghanistan and teach the resistance leaders tactics he had learned during his tour in the French Foreign Legion
- He did, and Joanne flew in to make the film (a tedious two-hour documentary which was hawked during fundraising dinners)

Charlie Wilson's first action

- Charlie became part of the Houston inner circle and declared he wanted to help
- Joanne insisted the CIA was playing a fake game in Afghanistan and even though Charlie had made a call to double the covert-aid budget for the mujahideen, she wanted him to be the mujahideen's true champion. Wilson's manhood, she implied softly, was on the line

Chapter Five: The Secret Life of Charlie Wilson

Perfect cover for Charlie Wilson

He promoted his vices and hid his virtues. 'The biggest party animal in Congress' *New York Times* editorial in 1996. If Wilson made it hard for the *Times* to recognise the power and influence he wielded in 1996, it was nothing compared to the public face he projected during the 1980s, when he seemed to be little more than a public joke. He almost never spoke on the House floor. He wasn't associated with any legislative initiatives. In this regard his cover was perfect.

The other Charlie Wilson

What every professional in the House of Representatives knew was that simultaneously another very different Charlie Wilson was at work. He was, in effect, running a tunnel right into the most powerful places in Washington... Wilson was a genius at the inside game of manoeuvring in the Balkanized world where power is distributed in blocks and where deals are made when you have something to trade. And ironically, because Wilson was such a political pro, his outrageous lifestyle seemed to actually enhance his position... everyone in the House knew who Charlie Wilson was. He was impossible to miss: too tall, too handsome, too loud, with too many striking female staffers by his side.

Charlie Wilson's first grab at Appropriations

He'd first broken from the pack and become a part of the legend of his party in 1976, when he'd defied his own Texas delegation and manoeuvred his way onto the all-powerful Appropriations Committee. That move had made Wilson a player – one of fifty House members with a vote on how the government's \$500 billion annual budget would be spent. The committee's power is so great that its twelve subcommittee chairmen are known collectively as the 'College of Cardinals'. The full committee holds the purse strings for the entire federal government, but it's such an immense job that responsibility for the various branches of government are broken down and delegated to individual subcommittees. In the end, that means that a lone appropriator who stays on a subcommittee long enough and knows what he wants can amass extraordinary individual power over agencies and the policies they pursue.

The milking system of Appropriations

To most members, the payoff for winning an assignment to Appropriations comes from the fact there is no better place in all of Congress to find pork – getting jobs for constituents or contracts for local industries.

Charlie Wilson's vision for Appropriations

Charlie had a grander vision than just reviving his poverty-stricken district, his passion, since boyhood, was foreign affairs, and from the moment he got on Appropriations he set out to position himself on the two subcommittees that dole out all money connected to national security.

Charlie Wilson and Appropriations

His Jewish friends had helped get him onto the committee. Once there, Charlie learned from these master politicians how to influence budgets and policies. When he won a seat on the Foreign Operations subcommittee, which allocates all US military and economic assistance, he was suddenly positioned to champion Israel's annual \$3 billion foreign-aid package. And since this subcommittee rules on the State Department's expenditures abroad, overnight he became one of twelve congressmen the State Department could no longer afford to alienate. In fact, these twelve legislators are treated as patrons who must be curried and pampered by ambassadors and even secretaries of state. P77

In 1980, just after being re-elected for a fourth term and only a few weeks before his Las Vegas weekend, Wilson struck again, manoeuvring himself onto the Defence Appropriations subcommittee. Now the Pentagon and the CIA were added to the list of federal bureaucracies that could no longer treat Charlie Wilson as a mere mortal.

The Defence Appropriations Committee

He was given the highest security clearance and an extra staffer and ushered into the soundproof hearing room under the Capitol dome, where he was shown his permanent seat – one of twelve large black leather chairs grouped around a horseshoe-shaped table. The room is closed off to the public as well as other members. Very little is ever written about what goes on when the twelve members meet in this chamber. But each year they preside over a kind of secret court, where huge deals are cut and important

policies made or broken. Since hundreds of billions of dollars are at stake – and since only so many programmes can be fully funded – enormous pressures and inducements are brought to bear upon these twelve men. P78

Influencing the Defence Appropriations Committee

It's a big government, and everyone has a favourite weapons system or spy satellite, an embassy to be refurbished, a rescue mission to be funded, and assets to be traded. The White House, the defense contractors, the military services, fellow congressmen – all manoeuvre around and encircle the appropriators, seeking their support. Each year, in effect, the lobbyists create their own power list, a ranking indicated by the dollar amounts they dole out to congressmen in campaign contributions. Charlie Wilson was always at the very top of this list, usually occupying the second spot, right below his intimate friend John Murtha, chairman of the Defence Appropriations subcommittee. P78

Charlie Wilson was quickly accumulating powerful allies and IOUs. He was also playing a far more interesting and effective insider's game, in areas of the House that were not visible to outsiders. 'You've got to look at the house like a college class where fraternities are everything,' explains Denis Neill, a Washington lobbyist who is one of Wilson's oldest friends and allies. 'If you are not in the right fraternities you're not in the game, and no one is in so many different important fraternities as Charlie Wilson.' P79

'The way things normally work, if you're not Jewish you don't get into the Jewish caucus', Neill says. 'But Charlie did. And if you're not black you don't get into the black caucus. They had a game, and he's the only white guy in it.' P79 [Wilson was close to Barbara Jordan, the black congresswoman who had served with Wilson together for six years in the Texas state senate before coming to Washington.]

Lobbyist Denis Neill

At the time, Neill was one of the capital's greatest manipulators of Congress in the foreign-affairs arena. His firm, Neill and Company, represented clients like Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco, and Jordan. His job was to get them US money, weapons systems, and good press; to do damage control; and provide influence in the corridors of power. One way he did it was by making campaign contributions and giving favours to congressmen on the committees that control foreign aid. P79

Wilson's other fraternity links

- His Bible Belt constituents were militantly pro-life, but he always voted for a woman's right to choose (his sister was chairperson of Planned Parenthood)
- He was one of the champions of the Equal Rights Amendment for women which he co-sponsored with Barbara Jordan back in the Texas legislature

Wilson's power base by 1980

By 1980 Wilson had established positions in a remarkably diverse network of congressional power centres: not just with Appropriations and his own Texas fraternity, but also with the Jewish caucus, the black caucus, the hawks, and the women. His most powerful fraternity however was with the Speaker of the house Thomas (Tip) O'Neill who elected him to the House Ethics Committee and the board of the Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts.

Tip O'Neill

The Ethics committee is supposed to serve as the conscience of the House and to rule on the conduct of its members. Wilson was elected during the ABSCAM sting operation. An FBI undercover agent disguised as an Arab sheik had managed to lure six congressmen and a senator into a Washington town house, where the bureau's hidden cameras captured them, one after another, taking \$50,000 bribes. Nearly all the ABSCAM bribe takers were Democrats, a difficult fact for Tip O'Neill.

In 1980, when the Republicans captured the Senate and Ronald Reagan the White House, Tip O'Neill emerged as the unrivalled centre of Democratic power in the country. P82

A special prosecutor had persuaded the House to expel one of the ABSCAM defendants, and was threatening to widen to inquiry beyond the six. One of the targets was Tip O'Neill's friend John Murtha. A close friend of Charlie Wilson. Tip offered Charlie a deal, go on the Ethics committee for a year, get Murtha off, and I will offer you the plum job of being on the Kennedy Centre board – free tickets to every concert to most of the shows. Useful for bachelor Good-Time Charlie.

It was hard work convincing people that Murtha wasn't taking a bribe on the tapes, but he did it. Murtha was off the hook. Murtha later would rise to become chairman of the awesomely powerful Defense Subcommittee and never forgot the favour. Neither did Tip O'Neill.

Joanne and Fawcett work on Charlie

Joanne Herring had cracked Charlie's code. She understood that beneath his devil-may-care lifestyle, Wilson was deeply ambitious, consumed with Churchillian visions of himself. She considered his womanizing of no particular consequence, the kind of thing great men with large ambitions are prone to do. She was never disapproving. Instead she just whispered like a siren in his ear, telling him he could change history. 'The mujahideen need you.'

Fawcett too worked on Charlie. He had been awarded the Pakistani highest civilian decoration for his work for the Afghans by Zia in 1981. The congressman finally threw in the towel that summer and told Joanne and Fawcett that he would go to Pakistan to meet Zia and the Afghans.

Falling out of love with Israel

Charlie Wilson had a scheduled trip to Israel that fall, and would tack on the Pakistan trip at the end. His power in the House had come primarily as a result of his work with the Israeli lobby, and the cause that burned brighter than ever for him that year was still the survival of the Jewish state.

Spring 1982, General Ariel Sharon had invaded Lebanon under the guise of clearing out PLO strongholds. At first, Wilson supported the act but went back to Lebanon and was traumatised by the sight of a massacre causing him to regret suggestions he might have made about egging on Sharon. P88

Chapter Six: The Curse of Aliquippa

Avrakotos the untouchable

After Gust Avrakotos's outburst against the head of the Clandestine Services, he was unemployable in the CIA. Stung, Gust went home to Aliquippa and asked a family friend (the town witch) to create a curse against his boss Graver. Had any of the teams in the CIA found out about the curse, they would have sent Gust away for psychiatric evaluation, but the curse was a private affair.

Evading dismissal

Gust didn't want to leave, so he set about hiding and biding his time. He had four weeks of administrative leave so he knew Finance would not cut off his salary for a month. He then set about finding someone in the Agency bold enough to give him a pay station before his administrative leave ended and the pay checks stopped coming in. He called in a favour from a friend in the Latin-American division who put him on the books.

He managed to disappear into the Agency's underground for an amazing seven months. He called on the untouchables – the mostly African-American code clerks, secretaries and couriers to keep him safe.

No one could understand how they could be so devoted to a man who routinely called them 'niggers' to their face. To Avrakotos it was simple. He identified with the Agency's African-American employees because they were just like him. 'If you're from Aliquippa in the CIA, you may not be black but you're still a nigger.' P95. They alerted him to stay away from certain floor where Graver or Clair George might be, they arranged for a VIP parking spot next to a side door that let him avoid the main elevators. They gave him a security pass that explained he was a doctor on consultation.

A new job

They then alerted him to the fact there was an opening in the CIA's Near East Division. And by chance an old mate, John McGaffin, was running the Afghan program. In the CIA cafeteria he was amazed when he heard the full story of Gust's recent adventures. 'If it's really true that you have nothing to do,' he said, 'why not come upstairs. We're killing Russians.'

Chapter Seven: How the Israelis Broke the Congressman's Heart and He Fell for the Muj

Wilson visits the Lebanese camps

The junket that was destined to forever change Wilson's life and the fate of the Afghans began on October 14, 1982 on a Pan American flight from Houston. The first class ticket and all the other expenses were picked up by the Appropriations Committee, for whom he was on a fact-finding mission to review US foreign-assistance programmes.

He visited the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps. 'In my usual knee-jerk fashion I assumed there was a certain amount of sensationalism in the press and assumed Israel's culpability had been exaggerated, but I also felt it my duty to see for myself.' P98. 'When we got into the camps,' he recalls, 'the grief and mourning was still going on. It had been maybe a week since the attack, and we walked down and ran into this woman who was an American Jew...she told me that her people had done something terrible. She walked us down to where the victims had been buried in a mass grave.... And I began to get a really terrible feeling in my stomach about it. And what was hanging over me was the Israeli guilt.'

'But when we walked about fifty feet and one of the American embassy people showed me where the Israeli command post was, and I looked at it and at that moment I lost it. My heroes were forever blemished because they would have had to be blindfolded not to have seen and heard what was happening. And then it was clear that they set up the whole thing and sat there and watched it.' Something dies in a man like Charlie Wilson when he loses his faith in the purity of a cause. P99

Keeping faith with Zvi Rafiah

What kept his emotions in check as he crossed the border...was the realisation that he would be having dinner with his friend Zvi Rafiah. Rafiah used to be the Israeli embassy's congressional liaison officer in Washington and was Wilson's closest friend since meeting during the Yom Kippur war.

Rafiah and Wilson's relationship

Over the nine years since the Yom Kippur war, the two had worked together on a never-ending series of Appropriations efforts. Wilson had confided everything in Rafiah, and together they had tapped ever more funds for Israel from the subcommittee... When Rafiah had left Washington to join Israel's largest defense company, Israeli Military Industries (IMI), Wilson had continued to help him. He'd gotten the Pentagon to buy a 'bunker busting' bazooka from IMI, and almost every year after that Wilson had dreamed up some new congressional gift for Zvi's IMI and for Israel.

Wilson behaviour to the Israeli lobby

Wilson is a professional pro, and didn't go running to the press or making enemies out of unforgiving friends like the Israelis over the camp massacre. On the surface he conducted himself as if nothing had changed. But the congressman felt marooned and betrayed by what he had witnessed. 'I simply withdrew myself emotionally from my previous affection. It's a terrible thing to become disenchanted with your first love.' P100

Enter the Afghans

The idea that Zia ul-Haq and the Afghans could replace the Israelis as the centre of Wilson's world drama never occurred to Wilson. In late 1982 the mujahideen had been fighting the Soviets for almost three years. Some 2.7 million Afghans had sought refuge in Pakistan. Wilson didn't fully understand it at the time, but this zone of displaced Afghans had become the true front line of the Cold War.

Zia's dilemma

The pressure got so intense that even Zia's own generals urged him to cut off the mujahideen. 'The Soviets were saying that Pakistan, by arming the Afghans, was technically fighting the Soviet Union itself'. The Soviets were shelling border towns, killing Pakistani civilians as well as Afghans and flying MiGs into Pakistani airspace.

At Leonid Brezhnev's funeral in Moscow, Yuri Andropov, the new Soviet strongman, took Zia aside and threatened to destroy his government if he didn't cut off the Afghan 'bandits'.

There has only been one pure holy war in modern times that rallied Muslims everywhere (a call to defend their faith), and that was the *jihad* of the Afghan tribesmen. Although he didn't know it, Wilson was about to enter a Muslim religious war in which Zia ul-Haq was the central player.

US government commitment to Pakistan's rule by Zia

Privately, the CIA, the State Department, and the Pentagon all gave Charlie Wilson high-level assurances about the commitment to Pakistan. But Zia remembered how Jimmy Carter's administration had attacked him for hanging Bhutto, for being a dictator, and for trying to build a nuclear bomb, and how it had cut off military and economic assistance... the take-it-or-leave-it deal that Zia offered the Americans demanded the US all but publicly renounce Jimmy Carter's attack on Pakistan.

ISI's military operation

He had read all about the Bay of Pigs, as well as Vietnam. Unimpressed by the CIA's paramilitary record, he refused outright to permit the Agency to operate directly with the mujahideen... Politely, the general insisted that the Americans run the entire operation through the 'Afghan cell' of his Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, the ISI. Under this agreement, the Agency was permitted only to deliver weapons and ammunition by boat to the port at Karachi and by plane into the military airport at Islamabad. There the ISI's military officers took over, loading the Agency weapons onto trains and trucks for secret transport to the border. P105

CIA Policy on weapons to the mujahideen

By official US policy, all weapons appeared Soviet-made. That way it was possible to maintain the fiction that they had been captured in battle. By the fall of 1982, when Wilson arrived, this unusual CIA program had unquestionably kept the Afghan resistance from being crushed. In dollar terms (about \$30 million) it was the largest Agency operation in more than a decade.

Appropriations and F-16 fighter jets

When the Reagan administration had fallen over itself to restore relations with Pakistan, Zia had demanded that the Americans sell him high-performance F-16 fighter jets... in spite of predictable opposition from the Israelis, the sale had been authorised. Foreign-military assistance money to buy the planes had been appropriated by Wilson's subcommittee.

Charlie Wilson had always been an irrepressible arms salesman for America, and that was doubly the case when it came to the F-16s. These jet fighters were made by General Dynamics in Fort Worth, Texas, then - House majority leader Jim Wright's district. The F-16 sale was not just good for the Pakistanis and bad for the Soviets; it was good for Wilson's powerful congressional friend, not to mention the defense contractors who poured \$200,000 into his campaign chest every two years.

Peshawar, the centre of the resistance campaign

Peshawar was only thirty miles from the Afghan border and minutes from the sprawling refugee camps. There were hidden storehouses and Afghan commanders living behind walled compounds surrounded by armed bodyguards. This was home to the leaders of the seven mujahideen military parties that the CIA and Zia's ISI had created to organise the war effort. But no one offered to take Wilson to visit these secret warriors. He hadn't yet earned the right to pass freely into that world. P109

Wilson's schedule called for the traditional tour of the UN-supported refugee camps, a scene that appalled everyone who came to Peshawar... It began to dawn on Wilson that there were only Afghans in this part of Pakistan and that he was witnessing an entire nation in flight from the Communists.

Red Cross Hospital

It was at his next stop, the Red Cross hospital on the edge of Peshawar, that he lost his heart to the Afghans. Wilson's whole sense of himself rested on his self-image as a champion of the underdog. The victims of Sabra and Shatilla had shaken him, and he was not proud that he had chosen to remain silent in the face of such brutality. Perhaps this had something to do with his reaction in the hospital when he met his first Afghan warriors... It was at this moment that Charlie Wilson realised he was in the presence of a people who didn't care about sympathy. They didn't want medicine or charity. They wanted revenge. P111

'It began to dawn on me right then and there that I didn't know what was going to happen, but with my rage and their courage I knew we were going to kill some Russians.'

Zia and Charlie meet for the first time

Up close, Zia did not seem remotely like the ruthless Islamist he was reported to be. He had a mesmerising aura, and Wilson was immediately charmed by his warm greeting and the absence of any

imperial trappings. This was the first of many meetings to come where these two unlikely allies would sit alone, keeping the US ambassador and other important dinner guests waiting, while they plotted the demise of the Russian empire.

Before Wilson left Zia's residence that night, they embraced and agreed to talk again the following month. Zia was scheduled to meet Ronald Reagan in Washington, but first he would fly to Houston to attend an elaborate dinner that Joanne Herring was organising in his honour.

Next, Charlie Wilson directed the US embassy in the name of the Honourable Charles Wilson, member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, to request a meeting with Howard Hart, the CIA's man in Pakistan.

Chapter Eight: The Station Chief

Background on Howard Hart

Howard Hart wasn't happy about briefing the congressman – but he was on a committee the CIA couldn't afford to alienate, and Hart, ever the disciplined secret soldier, set out to do his duty.

Hart was so proud of his place within this elite that he would always say he had not joined the CIA, but the Clandestine Services of the United States of America. He used to tell each class of new recruits that he trained, that they were joining a priesthood, and no one should apply or begin to serve if he didn't feel the sense of mission. It could not be for money or fame; it had to be for love of country.

- He was interred in a prisoner of war camp as a child in the Philippines, and was rescued by American soldiers, a feat he never forgot
- Halfway through college his father went bankrupt and he was forced to drop out
- He went to the university of Arizona for free and graduated in Oriental Studies
- Like Gust, he was inspired by Kennedy to serve his country
- He joined the CIA in June 1966, and was sent to India and Pakistan for five years
- 1978 was sent to Iran to work undercover as the CIA station chief
- After the revolution lived, hidden, for four months, until the embassy was attacked and 52 Americans were taken hostage. He made his way back to Washington and a hero's welcome
- Put in charge of the Pakistan-Afghanistan desk and then seconded to try and rescue the Tehran hostages. He was thwarted when the mission was bungled, but was awarded for the attempt
- Reagan came to power and his new CIA director, William Casey, was talking about going on the offensive. Casey wanted to bloody Russian noses in Afghanistan, and Hart was the logical choice to take on the Afghan operation
- He became chief of station in Islamabad and took on the air of field marshal, increasing the arms flow the mujahideen
- He didn't believe the Afghans were ever going to defeat the Red Army, and the CIA was not used to winning battles

Meeting with Wilson

The congressman still had his suspicions about the Agency, but the one thing he knew for certain when he walked through the embassy with the handsome, blond forty-two-year-old American was that Howard Hart was the real McCoy.

When Wilson announced to Hart that money was no object and that he would personally see to it that Congress appropriated whatever amount Hart wanted from the mujahideen, the station chief was suddenly alarmed. 'God protect us from our friends,' he thought. [This was the time when the 'secret war' in Nicaragua was getting bad press]

Hart figured Wilson was the kind of politician who might just succeed in compromising the entire operation, all in the name of rescuing it.

In the end he believed that the money was useful, and he managed to convince his bosses that a large-scale covert operation was possible. Hart's greatest coup was to win over General Akhtar, the stern and secretive intelligence chief who would be his great ally in the venture. The friendship was genuine, but

it was also the product of a highly disciplined operational effort. As Hart saw it, his relationship with Akhtar was the best way the US could effectively influence the one man who counted – Zia.

Hart and Akhtar, Wilson and Zia

That was the crux of the matter: how far was Zia willing to go? The station chief had no way of knowing that Wilson was then in the process of forging a direct relationship with Zia. Soon this link would end the convoluted process that Hart had so carefully erected to service his country's goals. But back then, Hart could not imagine the Pakistanis taking Wilson seriously.

Chapter Nine: Cocaine Charlie

Joanne Herring's party for Zia

A reception no-one would forget. Especially as Joanne stood up at the speech-session of the dinner and announced 'I want you all to know that President Zia did not kill Bhutto.' She then began an impassioned defence of Zia. It was hard not to feel a little sorry for the dictator, forced to sit there with a genial smile as his honorary consul carried on.

Zia, Charlie and the Israelis

Eventually his American visit was something of a triumph, and Joanne's dinner was part of the reason it succeeded. Charlie and Zia held a private talk. The congressman had a novel proposition for the Muslim dictator. Would Zia be willing to deal with the Israelis?

This was not the sort of proposal just anyone could have made. But by now, the Pakistanis believed that Charlie had been decisive in getting them the disputed F-16 radar systems. As he saw it, Wilson had pulled off the impossible. He told Zia of his experience of the previous year when the Israelis had shown him the vast stores of Soviet weapons they had captured from the PLO in Lebanon. The weapons were perfect for the mujahideen. If Wilson could convince the CIA to buy them, would Zia have any problems passing them on to the Afghans? Zia, ever the pragmatist, smiled on the proposal, adding 'Just don't put any Stars of David on the boxes.' P132

Charlie oversteps the mark

Pakistan did not have diplomatic relations with Israel, and Wilson certainly had no authority to serve as a quasi secretary of state. In fact, the congressman was walking dangerously close to violating the Logan Act, which prohibits anyone other than the president or his representatives from conducting foreign policy.

CIA versus Charlie Wilson

The CIA has a polite ruse for keeping senators and congressman out of its hair. Whenever a member not on the House or Senate Intelligence Committee calls to request a briefing on a secret operation, the Agency is always polite but asks them to clear it with the chairman of the appropriate Intelligence Committee first.

Information in the capital is power, and Intelligence Committee members don't like sharing it. Thus the CIA regularly manages to ignore the hundreds of individuals in the Senate and Congress who don't possess a key to the secret bureaucracy.

But Charlie Wilson's Defence Appropriations subcommittee is another matter. It controls the CIA's budget, even if historically its members haven't concerned themselves with the details of the Agency's operations. He was to be met in his offices by the Agency's Near East division chief Charles Cogan.

Despite appearances, Wilson realised that this mandarin of the Near East Division had come for no other reason than to patronise him... The meeting left Wilson sobered about the problems he might face trying to rally his own government. 'I was discouraged,' he says. 'I figured that Cogan was formidable and shared none of my enthusiasm for the fight. I realised he was going to be one tough cookie to budge.' [Wilson was developing his passion for finding a weapon that would shoot down the Soviet helicopter gun ships that were decimating the Afghans.]

The weekend in Las Vegas

Just as Charlie was preparing to take on that battle, the lurid details of his hot tub weekend in Las Vegas surfaced on national television. Suddenly, it called into question Wilson's ability to stay in Congress, much less stay out of jail. P135

Until the story broke, Wilson's political star had been rising. He had been scheduled to be one of the Democratic Party's representatives to respond to President Reagan's State of the Union address. He was immediately replaced once newspapers across the country headlined the charges: 'Drug Probe Targets Wilson'. The nickname Cocaine Charlie began making the rounds.

Wilson the hunted man

Rudolph Giuliani, the then-famed prosecutor was heading the Justice task force to find evidence Charlie was doing drugs. Investigators were working back through every nook and cranny of the congressman's past, locating his old girlfriends, playing tough with them, and taking depositions from all his employees, past and present.

Wilson was low and depressed, but his friends rallied around and covered (up) for him. Liz Wickersham, the former *Playboy* cover girl who had accompanied Wilson on his Las Vegas weekend was acting as his protector. All she would give the feds when she testified was information about Wilson's drug use outside the country, where US law does not apply. The investigators were looking for the limo driver who took him around Las Vegas. His lawyers suggested he leave the country and keep to his routine.

He did, and took with him a new girlfriend Carol Shannon. He met her in Texas and watched her belly dance, and on the spot he announced she must come to Egypt and dance for the defence minister. Carol jumped at the chance.

Chapter Ten: The Congressman Takes His Belly Dancer to the Jihad

Carol Shannon

Shannon grew up in a strict Baptist family in East Texas. Dancing was the work of the Devil, and that was just what young Carol wanted to do. She moved to Dallas, married, took up belly dancing lessons to try and impress her husband, he wasn't, but her fame spread. She danced with the Fort Worth Symphony's performance of *Samson and Delilah*, and became the darling, first of the Fort Worth high society, and then Charlie Wilson.

Charlie takes Shannon to Israel

He found her a kindred spirit during the scandal of the drug investigations. They flew to Israel where Charlie was scheming with Zvi's associates at IMI for weapons for the Afghans. The Israelis were hoping these deals would serve as the beginning of a range of under-the-table understandings with Pakistan that the congressman would continue to quietly negotiate for them. Charlie Wilson was marching into a truly forbidden zone. It was a potentially explosive attempt to bring the Israelis into the Muslim jihad that the CIA was funding against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

The Charlie Horse weapon

As Charlie got up to leave his meeting with Zvi at IMI, they presented him with an impressive-looking design... it was a mule-portable, multi-rocketed device named the Charlie Horse. Flushed with excitement, Wilson told Zvi and his boss that he would present it to the CIA with an ultimatum: either use it or come up with something better.

Charlie and Shannon fly to Egypt

Five days into the trip Wilson and Carol Shannon boarded the secret Jerusalem-to-Cairo shuttle mandated by the Camp David Accords. It was the only flight linking Israel to any part of the Arab world in those days. Charlie brought along a bizarre collection of travelling companions: Zvi Rafiah and his wife, plus Gila Almagor, his Israeli movie-star friend. All three Israelis were jumpy.

The Egyptian Defence Minister

Wilson's lobbyist friend Denis Neill had masterminded the meeting with Field Marshal Mohammed Abu Ghazala. Neill had sensed fantastic foreign-aid opportunities for his client, and, knowing Wilson's power and his penchant for personalising causes, he had urged Abu Ghazala to cultivate the congressman. It wasn't hard. Abu Ghazala was Wilson's kind of man: a hero of the 1973 war, a true hater of communists, and best of all, a Muslim who drank whiskey, loved women and was possessed of an endless supply of ethnic jokes from every country in the world. A friendship blossomed and Charlie Wilson, the old Israeli commando, added another identity to his portfolio: champion of Egypt's foreign aid as well as Israel's.

Belly dancing

Carol Shannon's dancing was a revelation to Abu Ghazala in the years of Egypt's fundamentalist religion. It was provocative and she could go home now knowing that she had danced in Cairo and won the heart of a modern pharaoh.

Egyptian weapons for the Afghan cause

Until Sadat changed sides in the late 1970s, Egypt had been a Soviet client state. Its warehouses were filled with Soviet weapons, and its factories were still tooled to manufacture Soviet-licensed material. Egypt was already providing some of the weapons in the CIA's Afghan pipeline, but Abu Ghazala explained that there was no end to the quantity and sophistication of what he could provide. And because of their friendship, he assured Wilson, there would be no problem getting Egypt to go along. No one else need be involved. No Foreign Office discussions would be necessary. If Charlie could get the money, Abu Ghazala would supply everything else to bring down the gunships.

No stopping Charlie now

The Texan was now in full throttle, violating diplomatic taboos at every stop: bringing Israeli spies and movie stars to Cairo, commissioning the Israelis to design an anti-aircraft gun for the CIA, and negotiating secret weapons deals with the Egyptian defence minister. Next stop, Pakistan.

Wilson and Shannon in Karachi

Wilson, mindful of local customs, declared Carol was a member of his staff and admonished her to wear lots of clothes, show no skin and avoid seeming too friendly. She complied, but the skin-tight jumpsuits didn't help relations. But Joanne Herring intervened and smoothed the friction.

Wilson flew to Peshawar to visit the International Rescue Committee Hospital again, and to give blood. Losing himself in the presence of these fearless victims and knowing that the Red Army was just over border always liberated him from the terrors of his personal life. Throughout the entire Afghan campaign, twice a year or more, Wilson would always visit this hospital.

Wilson vs. Hart

By this time, Hart had come to loathe Charlie Wilson and he was horrified to learn that the congressman was back in his territory. Hart did not realise at first, but intuitively understood, that there was an alien force moving about in his carefully seeded garden. His disadvantage was that Wilson had a far larger field of vision than he did, larger even than that of the CIA director or the White House, because the bottom line in all government programs is money from Congress. And unlike almost everyone else, Wilson always had a sense of what was possible and what was not in his world of Appropriations. P149

Role of Pakistan in the war

The Pakistanis were now playing a very dangerous game. But as Yaquub Khan (foreign minister) suggests, it was potent therapy for Zia and his military. By becoming the indispensable link between the mujahideen and the West, the Pakistanis were able to lash out at India's superpower patron, the Soviets. Afghanistan's conflict had become the Pakistan army's war of redemption. P151

None of this reflected the current thinking of the US government. But most Pakistani military officers had grown up on Hollywood films, and dealing with a larger-than-life Texan like Wilson was a far more familiar experience to them than the grey figures from the CIA and State Department, who always behaved so properly.

Zia's problem was that he did not dare permit a radical escalation unless he could be guaranteed huge amounts of US aid, both to build up his army and to demonstrate to the Soviets that the Americans

stood ready to protect Pakistan. That could be done Wilson said, but not by relying on the State Department and the CIA to deliver. The key to opening the foreign-aid spigots and keeping the money flowing, Wilson explained, was one man – someone Zia had never heard of. ‘His name is Doc Long – he’s the chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee that doles out foreign aid.’ Wilson and Carol left on the presidential plane from Islamabad to Karachi and on to a home where a federal posse was closing in to destroy him.

Chapter Eleven: The Rebirth of Gust Avrakotos

Gust’s career ambitions

Gust Avrakotos took to the Afghan programme like a duck to water. He became indispensable to John McGaffin. By the middle of 1983 McGaffin was to be promoted elsewhere and Gust desperately wanted his job. The Afghan operation was small, but as he realised what these tribesmen were prepared to do if given more support, Avrakotos lusted to take over the programme.

Technically Gust Avrakotos was in the running... but he was simply not a contender and not only because he had made so many enemies. He just wasn’t presentable in the way that others were. And the CIA had a powerful reason to be extremely cautious when it came to filling its most visible posts. ... No government likes to acknowledge what its spies are doing – particularly when it’s dirty business. For that reason, there is an undeniable impulse to hire men for this line of work who, when seen in public, present a sober, upright image. The post went to Alan Fiers, the politically astute chief of station in Saudi Arabia. [Fiers would later be indicted over the scandal of the Iran-Contra dealings.]

Acting Chief

Fiers’s Saudi tour was not scheduled to end for a few months, so an acting chief had to be found. McGaffin urged Gust to take it and he did. With that, Avrakotos began plotting to push Fiers aside, keenly aware of the unwritten rule in the Directorate of Operations: if you hold a major post for three months as acting chief it’s yours.

Howard Hart’s reaction to Gust Avrakotos

In Islamabad, Howard Hart viewed Avrakotos’s promotion almost with as much disgust as he had Charlie Wilson’s entry into the war. ‘I had known Gust for years and never liked him. He’s just a horrible man... Had I stayed on much longer I would have gone to Chuck Cogan and said, ‘It’s either him or me.’ P157

Gust’s first move

From day one, without asking for a penny more from Congress, he began to dramatically increase the purchasing power of the Agency’s weapon’s budget – just by introducing a bit of competitive shopping... By the time Avrakotos came into the picture, the procurement operatives were buying just about any Lee-Enfield .303 ammunition available on the world market. The Agency had already slipped more than 100,000 of these WWI-vintage rifles to the Afghans. It takes an enormous amount of ammunition to feed that many rifles and the procurement people weren’t able to get as much as the mujahideen needed. The bigger problem was the cost. Arms merchants knew the Agency needed them so the prices soared. Avrakotos was disgusted.

Cheaper Ammunition

Through one of his old Greek military buddies, Avrakotos learned of forty million rounds stored in a Yugoslav mushroom cave, which represented half of what Howard Hart needed to fill his annual budget for the mujahideen that year. It was a perfect setup. The Yugoslav army wanted the money and didn’t like the Russians; the farmers wanted their caves back so they could grow mushrooms; and all the Agency had to do was provide phoney end-user certificates so that it would look as if the ammo was going to someone other than the Americans. Instead of eighteen cents a round, Gust was able to buy the stash for seven cents a round. It was a mini coup.

He also secured, from a Polish general, Soviet SA-7 surface to air missiles, right from under the nose of the Red Army.

Art Alper

Art Alper was a man who made his living surprising people, and his head was alive that fall with the deadly assignments he was beginning to work on for Avrakotos. For thirty years he had specialised in the creation of nasty and often lethal devices in the Office of Technical Services. Alper loved his work. But then the Vietnam War ended and the Church Committee investigations had all but wiped out his beloved deadly specialty. By the time the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the CIA no longer had a stable of deadly tinkers to call on. But Gust gave him the call, and the task to rebuild the inventory was given to Alper, who began roaming the world in search of deadly hardware, dividing his fieldwork between Central America and Afghanistan.

Like most of the CIA veterans who got caught up in this secret war, Alper loved doing to the Soviets in Afghanistan what they had done to the Americans in Vietnam.

Portable blast boxes

Alper had discovered a lightweight, portable, blasting device for sale in Europe for \$113. After taking it apart, he decided he could have it made in the US for about \$90. But commissioning a US company to arm the mujahideen called for breaking the prohibition on American-made weapons. But in Avrakotos, Alper found a risk-taking, rule-breaking boss who figured that even if the Soviets did capture some of these little black boxes they would never be able to point the finger at the CIA. 'And what was the KGB going to do even if they found out – sue us?'

Avrakotos toughening the Agency's tactics

Avrakotos was now working to toughen the Agency's tactics, but by later standards the war he was presiding over in 1983 was remarkably tame. Congress had appropriated only \$15 million for the Afghans that year, concealed in an air force appropriation. The Saudis, convinced that the Soviets would come after them next if they were not stopped in Afghanistan, had agreed to match the US commitment to the mujahideen dollar for dollar and to permit the CIA to direct the programme.

This still only meant \$30 million to run a guerrilla war twelve thousand miles away, against a superpower then able to intimidate every nation in the world.

Redefining the weapons

To evade the lawyers' rules about the 1977 congressional ban against any assassination plotting, Avrakotos introduced an Orwellian change in the language to describe weapons or operations in the Afghan programme. 'These aren't terrorist devices or assassination techniques,' he would inform his staff. 'Henceforth these are individual defensive devices'. Sniper rifles were finally shipped out to the mujahideen, but only after Gust renamed them 'long range, night-vision devices with scopes.' He countered the lawyers with one of his own, Larry Penn, the perfect consigliere to foil the lawyers. Penn's instructions were to employ euphemisms and to drone on with boring double-talk so long that he would make the entire operation seem tedious.

Street wise

Throughout his Afghan tour, Avrakotos did things on a regular basis that could have gotten him fired had anyone chosen to barge into his arena with an eye toward prosecuting him. But then Avrakotos was not just lucky. He was brutally worldly wise, keenly aware of the internal risks, he was taking. And so he always made it difficult for anyone to get him, should they try. He left no paper trail. He always surrounded himself with like-minded outcasts who understood and approved of his code of conduct.

Chapter Twelve: The United States v Charlie Wilson

Stuart Pierson

Stuart Pierson was hired by Wilson to be his lawyer. He was a specialist in white-collar crime, and he was on a mission to rescue yet another endangered politician. He sensed Wilson's aggressive state of denial and opened by warning Charlie: 'It's not just your political career you can lose, you could go to jail over this.'p170

Tactics to avoid disaster

As far as Person was concerned, his client was a walking time bomb. If he was to have any chance, Wilson would have to be fenced in, and Pierson proceeded to read him the riot act. Absolutely no talking to the press. And stay away from Liz Wickersham. Everything depended on her. The feds were pressuring her to testify that the congressman had been snorting cocaine. He could end up with an obstruction-of-justice charge for almost anything he said to her.

Wilson's coping mechanism

- He took to drinking Scotch heavily
- He buried himself in work, meeting the Pakistan ambassador to Washington among others
- He relied on the loyalty of his friends who stonewalled the feds
- He threw a huge fiftieth birthday party for himself, and later one for his sweetheart Joanne Herring
- One of Wilson's Texan friends' son was the limo driver in the Las Vegas case who claimed Charlie didn't do coke in the car

Doc Long

As chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on government operations, Clarence D Long presided over the twelve men who dole out the State Department's entire budget as well as *all* foreign military and economic assistance. Few outside the US government had ever heard of him, but chairman Long was one of the barons of the feudal world that is US congress, and he made sure that everyone who came before his Appropriations subcommittee understood the power he held over them. He even had what he called his 'golden rule' inscribed on a plaque and hung in the hearing room...it read 'Them that has the gold makes the rules.' p175

Long's Character

As the chairman's long-time aide Jeff Nelson explained, 'It was always in ordeal for anyone to approach the chairman for anything: Doc had this horrible habit of spitting in the halls. He'd spit as we were walking, often hitting the baseboards on the wall'... Nelson told of one meeting when Doc summoned the secretary of defence Caspar Weinberger and much of his high command into his office, where he slowly and sloppily munched on a tuna-fish sandwich while they briefed him. It was an ugly way of making a point, but Doc liked to remind higher-ups who wrote out their checks. P175

Long's relationship with Wilson

Wilson was not one to be intimidated by Doc's theatrics. For one thing, he knew that the chairman liked him. They were both staunch supporters of Israel as well as old-fashioned anti-Communists. Beyond that, Charlie knew that Doc had a weakness that could be exploited: he happened to be extraordinarily responsive to flattery. Charlie had watched how easily the Israelis had seduced him, so effectively that Long's aide had concluded that the main reason Doc had become so passionate about Israel was simply because the Israelis were so wildly attentive to him.

Junkets

The chairman had developed a taste for grandiose junketing. In particular he liked to travel to Europe, and he liked to go better than first class on specially-detailed air force jets. Long's problem that summer was that he just couldn't convince enough congressmen from his committee to go with him to justify to cost of the government plane. No matter how grand the trip, they couldn't bear the thought of having to spend any time at all with this rather disgusting and hopelessly eccentric tyrant. Wilson decided that he would convince enough of his colleagues to go if Doc would include a trip to Pakistan to give General Zia and the Afghans a hearing. P176. It was an offer Doc couldn't refuse.

Prosecutor's decision about Charlie's case

In late July the federal prosecutors announced 'We have insufficient admissible, credible evidence to support criminal charges' In his office at the Rayburn House Office Building, Wilson told reporters, 'I feel relieved.' Then asked a staffer, 'Would you bring me a glass of wine, to calm my nerves a little bit.' There was still the House ethics investigation to cope with, but Wilson went out and celebrated. The *Austin American-Statesman* soon reported to its Texas readers how 'Good-Time Charlie's friends had thrown him a 'Beat the Rap Party'.

The junket to Paris

Charlie Wilson took Joanne Herring first to Paris, where they attended the Paris air show (Charlie doggedly searching among the thousands of weapons for a mule-portable anti-aircraft gun to give to the mujahideen). He met up again with Denis Neill and the Egyptian defence minister Abu Ghazala; and his Israeli friends. Joanne was bemused and didn't know Charlie was pursuing his secret negotiations to put together the Israel-Pakistan back channel.

Joanne's beau monde

The world Joanne introduced to Charlie at night in Paris was as bewildering to Wilson as his arms bazaar was to her. At one point Wilson found himself seated next to an elderly lady whom Joanne introduced as royalty, and he braced himself for an evening of dutiful conversation.

'Do you know Imelda Marcos? The woman asked the congressman in a rather affected voice.

'No, I'm afraid I don't,' he said, taking a sip of his soup.

'I do,' he remembers the matronly lady saying. 'You haven't missed much. She's such a greedy cunt.'

A marriage proposal

At one of their dinners at Maxim's Charlie Wilson proposed marriage and Joanne accepted. Years later, trying to explain why she agreed to marry Wilson in the midst of the cocaine scandal, Joanne said, 'I never gave a thought to the drug business.'... Joanne saw a flawed but heroic figure fighting the Communist devil, during God's work and she meant to be a part of it.

At last, everything seemed to be falling in place for the embattled congressman. He had beaten the drug rap, he had won the heart of the 'Queen of Texas', and now he had a three week trip to Pakistan to give to the Jihad. His and Joanne's plan to convert Doc Long had begun.

Chapter Thirteen: The Seduction of Doc Long

A problem with the drink

The night before the trip to Pakistan in August 1983, Wilson went out to dinner with an old flame Trish Wilson. He drank heroically and by the fifth round, Trish had agreed to spend the night with him, and after his eighth Manhattan cocktail he drove off in his old Lincoln Continental towards home, while Trish drove back to her apartment for a change of clothes. They were to meet at his place in half an hour. Driving over the Key Bridge he slammed into the back of a little Mazda, surprising but not injuring the driver. Satisfied the driver wasn't hurt, he swept back into his car and raced for home. But not before two witnesses saw the car and noted the number plate. Wilson panicked. 'I was drunker than shit. I had hit this car and knocked it forever, I knew that if the cops came I was dead meat. So...I just drove home and locked myself in my apartment. The police must have the world's fastest computer in northern Virginia, because they found my car and were banging on my door in thirty minutes.

Evading the cops

He called his administrative assistant Charles Simpson to get a lawyer. He realised that he either had to drive to Congress (safe ground) but he was too drunk, or bargain with the DC cops. It was the DC jurisdiction, so the Virginia cops at the door didn't have the authority to arrest him. Having assured his police mates that, as chairman of the Appropriations committee that funds the DC police force, he would be generous to them; he then organised for an escort officer and car to pick him up and drive him out to the jet waiting at Andrews Air Force base.

Resignation

Charlie Wilson confessed his evening's deeds to Doc Long who didn't castigate him; but it was the last straw for his ever-loyal assistant Charles Simpson. He knew this was it. He managed to put out the fires that Wilson left raging behind, explaining with a straight face to the press why the congressman had left the scene of the accident. 'He thought he hit a bridge railing and came on home.' P187 Simpson also paid off the other driver but 'from that day on, I just didn't give a shit what Wilson wanted,' he explained. A year later he resigned and went to work for a Texas senator. Wilson gave him his blessing.

Joanne in Paris

Joanne Herring was waiting for him in Paris and welcomed him with open arms. Nothing that Charlie did that year seemed to shake her – not the drugs, the stories of Liz and the hot tub, the belly dancer in

Pakistan pretending to be the congressman's secretary. The hit-and-run on the Key Bridge she treated as little more than a speeding violation. Perhaps the best explanation why she was so forgiving is that she had become a born-again Christian. And like all born-again, the Tempter was a very familiar figure to her... She told the self-flagellating Wilson that there was no time for moping, that he was wonderful, and that they had God's battle to fight.

Doc Long in Pakistan

Doc Long, that magical dispenser of US foreign-aid dollars, had grown accustomed to being made much of by governments. But General Zia, at the prodding of his honorary consul (Joanne), made sure that the chairman got a reception he would never forget. It was literally a red-carpet affair with a brass band, braided generals in full-dress uniform, lines of soldiers at attention, and small children with arms full of flowers running up to honour the suspicious old man. P190

The choreographed sequence of wooing Doc Long

- Golfers in the delegation were whisked away to a golf club and served tea with linen and silver
- Merchants at antique shops in Rawalpindi offered extraordinary bargains to the wives
- The highlight was a helicopter trip to the front
- A visit to the Red Cross Hospital (Charlie Wilson giving his usual pint of blood)
- A visit to the refugee camps (Doc Long's son had been wounded in Vietnam, so he understood the quiet courage of the assembled men)
- The entire delegation went to meet the mujahideen elders assembled in a huge tent

Doc Long's reaction

Here he was in the tent with men his own age who were bearing arms – men with grey beards and fierce eyes telling him about the murderous helicopters. They wanted someone from the delegation to speak to them, and Wilson shrewdly declined, offering the stage instead to his chairman...It was like the most heated revival meeting in East Texas. By the time Doc Long left the tent, Wilson realized that he had just witnessed the conversion of his enemy of the CIA into an honorary mujahid. That night in Islamabad, Zia administered the coup de grâce. Ordinarily he eschewed the luxurious palace but this night he had turned it into a vision out of the *Arabian Nights*, and like everyone else, Doc Long found himself entranced by this man of charm, intelligence and seeming sincerity.

In a meeting with Zia, Long pledged a commitment to pour millions of dollars in aid to Pakistan, and, specifically, to providing those marvellous Afghan warriors with the weapons they needed. Doc Long swept back to Washington and Charlie Wilson and Joanne Herring took themselves off to Venice to celebrate.

Chapter Fourteen: Gust's Secret

Gust Avrakotos heads to London

Gust Avrakotos and John McGaffin went, in 1983, to meet MI6 in London. It had been a generous invitation by McGaffin, and when he met 'the cousins' he was introduced as McGaffin's replacement, not the acting chief for only a few months. This conferred a status on Gust that he immediately sought to exploit.

Ahmad Shah Massoud

He learned of MI6's famous financial problems, but was impressed by the depth of their knowledge of Afghans and Afghanistan. Unlike the CIA and the US government, which operated a strict taboo against any Americans crossing into Afghanistan, British SAS commandos had been going in and out of the Panjshir since the beginning of the war. They calculated there were about three hundred reasonably serious commanders in action against the Soviets at that time, and that one of them, Ahmad Shah Massoud, was significant. He operated in the Panjshir Valley; a vital area as it was possible to interrupt the Soviet supplies by ambushing troops' supply lines there.

The British had close contact with Massoud, and the CIA wanted to know why he seemed to have stopped fighting. Agency intelligence came to the disturbing conclusion that the Afghan commander had stopped fighting in exchange for Soviet offers of food and guarantees that the Red Army would leave his villages alone. He had done this before in 1981 and again in 1982.

Pakistani intelligence vs. British intelligence

The CIA had to rely on the Pakistan Intelligence agency, and Avrakotos came to the conclusion that the reason Massoud wasn't fighting was because he wasn't getting his share of the CIA weapons. The Pakistanis preferred to arm the Pashtun tribesmen, who were enemies of Massoud's Tajiks.

British intelligence also explained that there were difficulties in getting supplies to Massoud because the roads were so heavily mined. Gust immediately offered them twenty five mine detectors and realised how strapped they were for cash.

Secret British and US deal-making

Gust Avrakotos realised he had something that these able and ambitious British spies desperately needed. With his American money he could put them back in the game. They had something equally valuable to offer him in return – no lawyers to contend with and, as Gust enviously put it, 'a prime minister to the right of Attila the Hun.' P201

Later, when Charlie's money began to roll in, Avrakotos says, 'The Brits were eventually able to buy things that we couldn't because it infringed on murder, assassination, and indiscriminate bombings. They could issue guns with silencers. We couldn't do that because a silencer immediately implied assassination – and heaven forbid car bombs!' p201

Running Massoud

Avrakotos did however decide that he wanted an independent channel to Massoud, rather than relying solely on MI6. During this time Gust showed up in Peshawar in disguise to meet Massoud's brother. Avrakotos was now beginning to assert his independence, even from the ISI, which until then had enjoyed control over the Agency's Afghan efforts. P202 He offered Massoud's brother an offer he couldn't refuse – By late 1984, Agency money would immediately begin to flow into Massoud's private Swiss bank account. And with Art Alper's input, all kinds of exotic hardware for killing Russians started to move on the backs of camels and mules towards the Panjshir. All Gust asked for in return that day was that Massoud kept killing Soviets and remember who his friends were.

Chapter Fifteen: The Opening Salvo

Doc Long demands a CIA briefing

When Doc Long returned from his junket, he moved quickly to fulfil his promise to President Zia and the freedom fighters. This time when the mercurial chairman asked the CIA to send someone to see him, the Deputy Director, John McMahon tapped Norm Gardner for the job. McMahon spelled out the mission: at all costs the case officer must pacify Long.

CIA's current trouble with Congress

In 1983 the CIA was already in serious trouble with Congress. It has been caught building a Contra army to overthrow the Sandinistas, and the Democratic majority in the House was in full revolt. Gardner did not know what to expect but he was not prepared for Long's opening salvo. He began pulling out glossy brochures and shouting that this was what he wanted the CIA to buy for the mujahideen. They were pictures of British Blowpipe and Javelin anti-aircraft missiles, and the excited old representative seemed to assume that Gardner would immediately take the brochures out to Langley and put the missiles into the pipeline for the mujahideen. P205 Gardner was careful to be respectful in discussing the missiles' merits and before leaving, he assured the chairman that immediate consideration would be given to his most helpful suggestions. What he really thought was that he had just left a loony bin.

A technical impossibility

Even with Doc Long's support, what Charlie wanted to do should have been technically impossible to begin with; funding for a covert program had always been the exclusive preserve of the president, and neither he nor the CIA had requested the weapons. In addition, the critical first phase of the legislative session had ended. And while the Appropriations Committee is the ultimate arbiter of funding, it cannot dole out money for any programme without a legislative committee having first authorised it. But Wilson, a veteran insider decided to reverse the process and back-end the money through. P206

Doc Long's spanner in the works

Wilson had worked his magic on his own subcommittee, and everything seemed on track for him to make his legislative strike when Doc Long stumbled across an article recounting the plight of a young, blind, orphaned Pakistani girl who had been raped. To the chairman's disgust, the article explained that by Islamic law, rape can be proved only if there are four witnesses. Since here there was only one, and since the girl admitted that intercourse had taken place, the Pakistani authorities promptly tried her and threw her in jail for fornication.

All bets were off. Hair swirling, eyes bugging out in fury, the chairman was calling his newfound friend Zia a barbaric dictator. Long dispatched his aid to inform the Pakistani ambassador that if the girl was not immediately pardoned, put in a home and cared for, Pakistan would be cut off. When informed, Zia quickly complied.

Wilson demands another CIA briefing

With Doc back in the fold, Wilson felt dramatically bolder. But before choosing a dollar amount to put into his Appropriations request, he summoned Chuck Cogan of the CIA for a final review of the situation. Cogan didn't want to go in alone – he had endured a tongue lashing from Doc Long before – so he roped in a witness. His preferred colleague was away, so Gust Avrakotos was chosen to go.

Charlie Wilson and Gust Avrakotos' first meeting

Avrakotos knew he was going to enjoy himself the moment he passed the threshold of the congressman's office and took note of Charlie's Angels. And the congressman struck gold with Avrakotos the moment he began talking to Cogan. 'Rays were coming out of him,' Gust recalls, 'and I could sense that he had an immediate dislike of Cogan. He was the only congressman I ever met who used the word 'fuck' in the first forty-five seconds.' P207. Wilson wanted to know what weapons the Agency had come up with to shoot down the Soviet helicopters. 'Nothing effective'. What about the Israeli Charlie Horse? What about buying Oerlikons – Swiss anti-aircraft guns? Wilson was on a roll. He didn't think much of Gust Avrakotos: 'He had a peasant's physique and those fucking tinted glasses that looked like they came off a shelf at Woolworth's. And very thick shoes. He was a real low-rent-looking guy.' P208

Across the desk, Avrakotos was anything but disapproving of Wilson. He was delighted by the way the Texan was sticking it to Cogan. He relished the thought that Wilson wanted to get things done.

Appropriations feeding frenzy

On the Hill, Wilson was now in the middle of the annual Appropriations feeding frenzy. Secretaries and undersecretaries of the navy, army, and air force and the long chain of defense contractors from General Dynamics, McDonnell Douglas, GE, Lockheed, and LTV all lined up, waiting their turn to plead their cases with the always receptive big spender on defense. Denis Neill and the main foreign-aid recipients were also putting in appearances: Zvi Rafiah from Israel and Mohammed Abu Ghazala from Egypt.

Lobbying for a bill

Now the amorphous drive to help the mujahideen had a specific focus. Wilson was envisaging Oerlikon guns on every mountain top in Afghanistan. He told Joanne that his first challenge was now likely to take place in the House. He owned the Appropriations subcommittee. But the Senate would have to sign off on it, and there the most important man would be the Alaska Republican Ted Stevens, chairman of the Senate Defence Appropriations subcommittee. For the Oerlikon bill to sneak through, Wilson was going to need Steven's support. Joanne set to work wooing him, organising intimate dinners with influential people.

[They made a few mistakes along the way, inviting rival fundamentalists to meals – and praising one that would become infamous as a fundamentalist radical who may have been involved in 9/11.]

The daring gamble

What Charlie Wilson did next has no precedent. Throughout the Cold War, the CIA and the White House had always acted alone in deciding how much money would be spent on covert programmes. Congress's only role was to rubber stamp the request to try to stop them. Never before had a congressman presumed the right to throw money at the Agency to escalate a secret war. More

unthinkable was Wilson's chutzpah in dictating what kind of weapon the CIA should introduce into a covert operation. P214

Step one: Wilson's method on the Appropriations committee

Wilson occupied a special place on this committee because he asked for little and almost always supported everyone else's pork-barrel proposals. Murtha had his research grants for Penn State, and Norm Dicks was always trying to relocate much of the defense establishment to his district in Washington. Charlie was always gracious in his support... And now, in the case of the Oerlikon bill, Wilson was not asking his colleagues for billions. All he wanted was \$40 million for a cause (shooting down Soviet gunships) that not even a liberal Democrat could find fault with... He floated from the subcommittee with approval.

Step two: Convincing the Senate

Next he had to persuade the defense appropriators from the Senate to go along with his unprecedented manoeuvre to escalate the CIA's war. Here anything could happen, so when the House and Senate defense appropriators met, Wilson adopted a simple strategy of building up chits. 'I voted for everything anyone proposed no matter what,' he recounts. 'I kissed every ass in the room.' He waited until his new friend Senator Ted Stevens asked if there was anything else to be considered from the House side. 'Yes,' Wilson said, rising to his feet. 'I'd appreciate \$40 million for the Afghan freedom fighters with \$17 million of that specifically earmarked for getting them a better anti-aircraft gun than they presently have.' He used a phrase that Doc Long first coined and would later become his trademark in such deliberations. 'This is the only place in the world where the forces of freedom are actually fighting and killing Russians.'

The House appropriators, of course, stood as one with Wilson. To his surprise, no one on the Senate side objected. Wilson says that moment was a revelation: it was as if he had pushed on a door and discovered that there was no lock and no one to complain if he charged in. p215

Chapter Sixteen: Howard of Afghanistan

Howard Hart and the CIA's reaction

Although Hart and the CIA worked with many branches of the government and drew heavily on the Pentagon's support, no one attempted to dictate to the station chief what tactical decisions he should be making... no one but Charlie Wilson. Hart could spot a mile away what was a first-class challenge to his command. Wilson's Oerlikon manoeuvre was nothing short of a direct slap in the face... In one fell swoop, this extraordinarily meddlesome congressman was threatening to upend the inflexible Cold War rule that the American hand never be displayed in a proxy war. P217

Hart's very specific fear was the reaction to the Swiss automatic cannons the Red Army might display... If the Red Army were to move even only half a million troops instead of the current force level of 120,000, it could break the resistance, Hart believed. And then the Soviets would surely move on Pakistan. The Agency had little choice but to try and reason with Wilson.

Hart prided himself on being a realist, and there were profound limits to what was possible in Afghanistan. For him and his Agency, the central reality was that the Red Army did not lose wars.

Wilson's visit to Pakistan

Wilson flew to Pakistan in January 1984 and didn't even bother to schedule a meeting with Howard Hart. Instead he met Akhtar and Zia who expressed gratitude for the \$40 million gift. He brought another of his beauties on this trip, a Nordic blonde named Cynthia Gale Watson, whom he introduced to everyone as 'Snowflake'. She was thrilled when Charlie told her she could sit in on the war meetings (in a nylon pink jumpsuit). The ISI, with the consent of the CIA, had chosen seven leaders from a mob of heroic chieftains. To a certain extent, the power of the seven and their respective political parties was a creation of Pakistan intelligence.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

One of the first of the top seven leaders to meet Wilson (and Snowflake) was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a fundamentalist warrior who was the darling of Zia and the Pakistan intelligence service. He ran his

Hezb-i-Islami organisation like the Communist Party and was utterly ruthless. [He later sided with Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War.]

Professor Mojadeddi

Next to meet the congressman was Professor Mojadeddi, a man with even more body guards than the previous leader. 'It's not the Soviets they're worried about,' a Pakistan ISI man later told Wilson. 'It's each other. They're all trying to keep from being killed by their rivals.' This was something Hart understood, but Wilson was in the early stages of unconditional adulation. And Wilson's heroic self-image made him see Howard Hart no longer as a daring spy but as a timid bureaucrat unwilling to take a risk for freedom.

The Afghan flaw

Hart had made his peace with this profound flaw in the Afghans and had even come to believe that a large part of their potency as a guerrilla force came from the fact that they were disunited. P225

Wilson and Hart meet

The next meeting between Hart and Wilson was frosty. Wilson tried to convince the Agency about the Oerlikons; Hart was thinking about managing perpetual conflict, using the Afghan war to help slowly erode the strength of the enemy in a global campaign that might go on for decades. Whatever it was, Hart could not cope with Wilson's pompous offer of unlimited weapons.

Exit Hart

Five months later Howard Hart would pack his bags, and leave Pakistan and the Afghan war for good – his three year tour was up. Back at Langley, Director Casey honoured him with the Agency's highest decoration. But as is the custom of the Clandestine Services, at the end of his Afghan tour, Hart saluted, closed the door, and never looked back. P231

Chapter Seventeen: Cogan's Last Stand

Charles Cogan's professionalism

In the CIA Cogan enjoyed the status of a three-star general. He didn't just oversee the Afghan operation; he had to deal with the hostage nightmare, with Khomeini, with Saddam Hussein, with the spread of nuclear weapons and so on. He felt the whole idea of an Israeli anti-aircraft gun for a Muslim jihad was absurd. Nor was he going to permit any non-Soviet weapons into Afghanistan... Wilson had been trespassing in areas where he did not belong and Cogan had politely shown him the door. P233

Wilson's revenge

The bill he had just muscled through called on the CIA to spend \$17 million for a Swiss anti-aircraft cannon (as well as another \$23 million to be left to the CIA's discretion) to be deployed in a campaign that everyone knew the president enthusiastically endorsed. Just to be sure the CIA got the message, Wilson had included language obligating it to inform him in advance how it intended to spend the balance of the \$40 million appropriation he had sponsored. And so, when the congressman requested a meeting, the Agency found itself with no real choice but to send Chuck Cogan back to try to sort things out. P234 They battled hard.

Joanne and Charlie

By early 1984, thoughts of marriage to Charlie had passed, but she still believed in the cause.

Problems with Saudi money

Joanne agreed to host a grand Washington party (her entrée into the DC world) for the dashing Prince Bandar, Saudi ambassador to the US. But the most important people she was hoping on attending were turning her down. Around this time, Bandar was convinced by Robert McFarlane, Reagan's national security advisor, to secretly fund the Contras. He agreed to pay a million dollars a month, along with helping the Afghan conflict by matching the US money dollar for dollar. He was becoming a very important figure in US-Saudi relations.

Washington party to honour Prince Bandar

Joanne spent three weeks working the phones, and getting all her friends to call in the favours for the party. By this time she had taken a romantic interest in another Texan, Jimmy Lyons who lured her into his passion – Angola, and Jonas Savimbi's anti-Communist freedom fighters. The night was a huge success. Joanne had Henry Kissinger on her right and White House Chief of Staff James Baker on her left.

CIA tries to block Oerlikon initiative

While Wilson was in Pakistan, the Pentagon weighed in to protest the unasked-for funds. General Richard Stillwell, in charge of all the Pentagon's black activities stormed into Wilson's office and yelled at Charles Simpson, his assistant. He barked that Wilson would know the \$40 million was scheduled to come out of existing Pentagon funds, and he was in a position to block that. His parting wisdom was that the congressman had no business sticking his nose into operational details of a covert programme. At least Stillwell had been upfront; no one else was. P242

Wilson's dilemma with his cause

For Charlie Wilson, Afghanistan had become a political mystery. Why was it that Ronald Reagan could invade Grenada, commission Star Wars, bypass Congress to keep his secret Contra war alive, and frighten everyone by branding the Soviets the Evil Empire, yet when Wilson made his move to up the ante and counter the most egregious Soviet aggression, he met only resistance? P243

Delaying tactics

According to Wilson, the CIA initially blamed the State Department for the resistance; the Pentagon said it was the fault of the Office of Management and Budget, which was refusing to release the \$40 million. But the OMB people Wilson spoke to said the Pentagon had refused to take the money out of existing naval funds, as the bill had specified. The reason for the delay was 'congressional confusion'.

Standard Funding Procedures

At first, Wilson thought he might be up against a turf battle led by the Senate Intelligence Committee, whose staffers were up in arms about the way he had usurped their role. Ordinarily, a CIA programme can be funded only if it is first authorised by the two Intelligence Committees. Having bypassed that step, Wilson now found himself having to make the process legitimate. Because the money had to be taken from existing Pentagon funds – 'reprogrammed' – he had pursued the chairman and ranking members of the House and Senate Arms Services Committee, as well as Intelligence, to sign off on the bill.

Horse trading

The House was no problem. Mel Price, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee was so senile that Charlie got a staffer to sign for him. Lee Hamilton, the highly respected House Intelligence Committee chairman, appeared ready to block the bill until Wilson warned his old ally Speaker Tip O'Neill that he was prepared to take to the floor and accuse the Democrats of selling freedom down the river. It was Wilson's way of cashing in an IOU, and O'Neill put in a call to Hamilton, who dropped his opposition.

That left the Senate – a distasteful place for any congressman to have to go hat in hand. Nevertheless, the Texan booked an appointment with Senator Sam Nunn, who surprised Wilson by quickly signing off. [He would become a strong backer in all of Wilson's Afghan proposals] Wilson's next stop was Senator Moynihan, the ranking Democrat on Intelligence, whom he lured out of a hearing: Charlie soon won his approval. The last remaining obstacle was the chairman of the Intelligence Committee, Barry Goldwater. Here Wilson figured he had a certain in if he dared to use it. The senator's son, Barry Junior, had been a target of the same federal drug-prosecution effort that had hounded him, and Charlie had always suspected that the senior Goldwater had been helpful in getting the case dismissed. He took a gamble on a joke about it and won Goldwater's understanding and his support.

Rebellion quashed

Wilson realised that this congressional rebellion had been much ado about nothing and that his real problems weren't at State, the Pentagon, OMB, or on the Hill. They were coming from Langley. Wilson believed Cogan was being poisoned by timid bureaucrats. Avrakotos came to secretly agree with a need to buy the Oerlikons for the mujahideen. But before it could be resolved, there was the

matter of the congressional elections. And Charlie Wilson, the playboy congressman, was in trouble at home. The hot tub, the drug investigation, and now the hit and run incident, it was all piling up.

Chapter Eighteen: The Birth of a Conspiracy

Constituency in East Texas

Trinity, Texas has a population of 2,648 and thirty three churches. Religion is a way of life in East Texas, and at the heart of that experience is a belief in the presence of Satan. It is in this rhythm of sin and redemption that the key to Charlie Wilson's political survival can be found. Charlie was in a curious way the Second Congressional District's designated sinner, a highly visible presence whom they could live through vicariously. And because he was forever getting caught, and forever coming home and owning up to his backsliding, entreating forgiveness, the generous hearted faithful regularly took him back into their hearts. P247

Working for the people

Ordinarily a congressman will buy or rent a branch office in addition to the main office in the district's largest city. Instead, Charlie bought a custom-made van which served to project his presence everywhere at once. Throughout the year, notices would go out announcing the arrival the following week of Congressman Charles Wilson. Charlie himself would rarely appear, but the van, filled with competent staffers and volunteers, would zoom into the neighbourhoods and help constituents with Social Security, Medicare, veterans issues, or any other problems they had getting the federal government to work for them. He was therefore very popular with the poor, the elderly and black citizens.

Solution to the slurs

Money. Charlie needed to overwhelm his Democrat rivals for the primary vote. And he needed carefully packaged campaign ads, a strategy that doesn't come cheap. He called on his friends

- Defense contractors
- Friends of Israel
- Joanne Herring and her friends

In all, the congressman pulled in an amazing \$600,000 – an astounding sum for a primary campaign in a depressed rural district where the local contributions totalled a mere \$20,000. He squeaked in and won 55 percent of the vote. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Ed Juchniewicz

Meanwhile Gust Avrakotos found a powerful new patron, Ed Juchniewicz (pronounced Gin-oh-witz) Clair George's number two man, the associate deputy director of operations. Juchniewicz approved of Gust's aggressive campaign and would later champion his cause. At one stage Juchniewicz went to the director and said that Afghanistan was going nowhere and that the Agency had to get tougher. According to him the director said, 'Go ahead, make your call, you're in charge.' P254

He immediately arranged for Avrakotos to get the permanent position running the Afghan operation (Clair George was out of the country, so Juchniewicz was acting chief). Chuck Cogan was reportedly appalled and tried to challenge the appointment, but lost. Juchniewicz would later look back on his act of bureaucratic daring and say that pushing Fiers aside and gambling on Avrakotos might well have been his most prescient decision in a long CIA career. P255

Wilson's ultimatum

Gust Avrakotos was in his new post and Charlie Wilson and the CIA were in a virtual state of war. Wilson decided to draw on his power to punish. He called Jim Van Wagenen, the Defense Appropriations staffer responsible for the black programmes and asked, 'What are the CIA's crown jewels?' Recognising the threat Van Wagenen warned his bosses that Wilson was going to go after the Agency's pet programmes if they didn't back off.

In retrospect, Wilson acknowledges that this debate over the Oerlikon, a weapon that ultimately proved to be of marginal value, was really not about the weapon itself. It was about his personal march, under the aegis of the US Congress, onto the seventh floor of Langley to force the Agency into a bigger war

than it wanted to fight. As he sees it now, this bureaucratic battle in 1984 was the defining moment of the Afghan war. Every other tactical decision to escalate, including the introduction of the American Stingers two years later, followed from it. P254

Wilson and Gust do a deal

Gust broke protocol by going to Charlie's office alone and confronted him about the Oerlikons. He suddenly appeared to Wilson as the CIA heroes he read about in novels. He convinced Charlie to make a compromise: an internal 'pilot programme' to buy a limited number of Oerlikons to test and evaluate them. The congressman lion was tamed, and Gust was hailed in the Agency as a hero. McMahon and Casey admired his cunning, the political lion tamer, able to contain the Agency's most dangerous and persistent congressional critic. P239

Gust's next step

Next meeting with Charlie, Gust opened by making it clear the enormous personal risk he was about to take. No one knew what he was doing and if Wilson accepted the proposition he must never let on where the idea came from. Then he dropped his bombshell. He wanted another \$50 million. 'You do a lot of talking about killing Russians. Now for someone as tough as you, you ought to be able to get \$50 million bucks, and I'd rather not have to wait until Christmas for it.'

It was outrageous request. Agency officers are not permitted to lobby congress for money. They're not even permitted to talk to members of congress without an authorisation and then only when accompanied by a minder. P259

Chapter Nineteen: The Recruitment

Wilson's successful 'trap'

Wilson knew that somewhere in the CIA there had to be people who thought as he did. He had tried to woo the Agency with offers of money. When that failed he stood on the outside and threatened to lay siege to their fortress if they didn't accept his offer. Avrakotos was the one who took the bait. The result was a mutual recruitment and the birth of a secret partnership that would soon transform the Afghan war. P261

The next \$50 million

Following Gust's instructions, Wilson telephoned Casey and said he was prepared to give the Agency \$50 million more for Afghanistan. Could the director use it? He mentioned he had already put this question to Avrakotos. Casey had no choice but to check with Gust who confirmed the programme could do with more cash. So the director had no choice but to sign off on the offer. Wilson set to work on the Appropriations Committee.

Wilson woos Appropriations again

'By this time I had everyone in Congress convinced that the mujahideen were a cause only slightly below Christianity,' Wilson remembers... 'I defended the \$50 million in front of the whole committee. We ordered the staff to leave. It was the only time I ever had to do this.' Wilson told his story of the freedom fighters... Whatever opposition had existed before had vanished by the time of the full committee vote. P262

First Avrakotos-Wilson conspiracy a success

When Charlie called Avrakotos the next day, it was to announce that he would soon have the entire \$50 million. 'We were just gleeful,' remembers Wilson. 'That \$50 million was a direct Avrakotos-Wilson conspiracy. We had made our first move together.' The figure grew to \$100 million when the Saudis' matching funds came through a few months later, a fact all the more astonishing because Congress was simultaneously moving to completely close down the Contra war. p263 From this time on they would begin to meet at least once a week in Wilson's office to plot further action.

Contra comparisons

The CIA director and Oliver North at the White House were just then starting to plot alternative routes to fund the Contras and bypass congressional restrictions. One can only imagine the director's confusion at Wilson's ability to tap huge sums for the Afghans while neither his nor President Reagan's direct appeal for Contra support had yielded anything.

Casey even tried to hit Wilson for a share of the Afghan money for his Contra campaign – ten percent. Wilson politely refused, claiming the Speaker Tip O'Neill wouldn't like it. What Wilson didn't tell the director was that he had already cut a deal with O'Neill, to sell out the Contras in exchange for leading the House when it came to funding the Afghan war. p265

Tip O'Neill's recollections

'I knew that Charlie was doing undercover work with the Defense Department and the CIA and everyone else, but we blinked while he was doing it. I figured Charlie was on the right side and I knew that no American soldiers were going to get involved. I used to tell him: 'I don't want to know this Charlie, you just go ahead.' And later, 'Did Charlie do it with my approval? No, but he did it with my consent.' P266

Gust's first ammunition commission

Flush with Charlie's money, Gust was able to operate effectively in the international arms bazaar for the first time. Under his direction, the Agency commissioned the Egyptian Defense Ministry to set up a production line for ammunition to feed all those Enfield rifles. He was sick of being shaken down by black marketers, and with this government-to-government contract, he could count on a guaranteed supply at fixed price. P267

Gust next plays the China card

Like the Egyptians, the Chinese army had once been equipped and trained by the Soviet Union, and had plenty of weapons. Still, no one thought the Chinese government would risk Soviet wrath by becoming the major arms merchant for the Afghan rebels. The deal was brokered by a brilliant American station chief in Beijing, Jo DiTrani who convinced the Chinese to sell to the CIA. Of Wilson's \$50 million, \$38 million went to the Chinese for AK-47 assault rifles, Dashika 12.7mm machine guns, anti-tank RPGs, and lots of ammunition. Avrakotos was amazed at how eager the Chinese were to get into the game. To his delight, he discovered that they were prepared to sell at close to cost. By late fall 1984, cargo ships filled with Soviet-designed weapons began moving from Shanghai, designed as junks for the 5200 nautical-mile run to Karachi. P269

First downing of Soviet helicopter gun ships

News of their arms success came when the National Security Agency, listening in on intercepts of Soviet 40th Army in Afghanistan, heard about the helicopters. Using a 12.7mm Dashika, a lone mujahid gunman brought down first one than another chopper. And killed twenty soldiers. History doesn't relate if the lone gunman was later killed, but this 'Mohammed the Conqueror' tape became legendary. Avrakotos gave a copy of it to Casey, who ended up playing it in his limousine coming from and going to Congress.

Chapter Twenty: No Wasps Need Apply

Gust Avrakotos's power base

Avrakotos was not a morning person, and invariably arrived late to work, having driven in his preposterous 1976 Emerald coup de Ville - the kind of car 'only gangsters and niggers drive' into a choice parking spot in the lot at Langley. He bought it in Philadelphia from 'a Mafia teamster guy in a bar.'

The South Asia Operations Groups, the formal name given to the agents assigned to the cluster of countries through which Gust exercised so much clandestine power, was located on the sixth floor, one down from the director's floor. The entire suite was nothing less than a giant strong room with a heavy metal door and combination lock. They didn't even have to put their classified documents into safes when they went home at night: the office was the safe.

The Iran branch

The case officers were not only responsible for the Afghan war but for India and Iran as well. Bleeding the Ayatollah was what the Iran branch was all about. In Gust's mind, there was nothing wrong with a bit of real politik; he approved of it wholeheartedly and knew he had good men in place in the Iranian section. There was little more that could be done, and he only spent perhaps 15 percent of his time supervising them. His real passion lay in the neighbouring suite of offices.

The Pakistan-Afghanistan branch

The Pakistan-Afghanistan branch was located in the vault, in an area totally lacking in character: government-grey walls partitioned to create semi-private work spaces. Although every desk had a telephone and typewriter, there were few computers. It could have been mistaken for an old-fashioned newsroom, save for the huge map of Afghanistan and the romantic, poster-size pictures of mujahideen on horseback.

The Dirty Dozen

The entire staff of the Afghan branch numbered only fourteen men and women – rounding off, Gust referred to them as the ‘Dirty Dozen’. It would remain an article of pride with Gust that the core group stayed small, even as the programme grew to almost \$1 billion a year. The numbers were deceptive because the fourteen were able to draw upon hundreds of Agency people, both at headquarters and around the world... Avrakotos took particular pride in comparing his lean staff to the Central America task force, with its ninety agents bumping into one another as they micromanaged the disastrous Contra war. p276

Dwayne the Intelligence Analyst

‘I took people no one wanted,’ he says. ‘I took the outcasts. It was my way of demonstrating that you don’t have to go to Amherst to succeed... I had the worst band of derelicts ever assembled. There was Dwayne, the intelligence analyst, all twisted up from childhood bouts of polio. He could barely walk. It would take him ten minutes to take a piss. But he had a passionate, underdog streak. He was my walking encyclopaedia about the Russians and everything to do with the mujahideen. I would use him to grind out bureaucratic memos defending the programme from the attackers.’ Soon Gust had Dwayne publishing a weekly Afghan update that he distributed as a top-secret document to forty of the main policy makers at the State Department, the White House, Pentagon and inside the CIA. Gust knew that if these reports had a high enough classification, they’d be sure to leak – which was his intention. P276

Larry Penn

Then there was Larry Penn the lawyer who turned out as Gust’s ‘consigliere’. Penn’s legal rules were of enormous importance, since he interpreted how Avrakotos could delegate the dollar-for-dollar matching grants that the Saudis had contributed to the secret war.

Hilly Billy

Moving money into the black market and through all of the secret channels of the world of espionage was the special preserve of a man whom everyone called ‘Hilly Billy’. Gust knew well how easy it was to get stymied moving millions of dollars of unacknowledged funds. ‘Have you ever tried to open an unnumbered Swiss bank account for the US government? It takes six months because of all the red tape. The Agency can do it in four to six weeks because they’re good. But this guy, Hilly Billy, could do it in twelve hours. A sign over his desk read, ‘War is Not Cheap’.

Paul Broadbent

The man tapped to run psychological warfare was Paul Broadbent, a second-generation American who grew up in a Russian neighbourhood of Cleveland. ‘He was the hearts and minds expert,’ Gust says, ‘the kind of guy who pulls the wings off of flies, dangerous if you don’t channel him properly.’

Art Alper

Art Alper, the demolitions expert, was a particularly offbeat presence in the office: with his grandfatherly face, his violent schemes and his burgundy plaid pants. ‘All the secretaries saw him as a dirty old man. But as Gust says, ‘he was a genius with mines and at demolition. I’m sure it was the first time in his life he really felt wanted.’ Gust was trying to promote just such a sense of belonging, in essence creating his own CIA tribe within the tribe.

Tim Burton

The heart of everything was arming the mujahideen. Here the man Avrakotos most strongly relied on to acquire and move staggering quantities of ordnance was long-time veteran Tim Burton. It would be up to Burton to move millions of ammunition rounds, thousands of AK-47s, night-vision goggles, medical kits, and herds of mules, all through hidden channels from a dozen countries into one of the most inaccessible lands in the world. ‘If you know who Radar is in M*A*S*H, that was Tim.’ P279

Team spirit

Close to half of the officers in the Afghan branch, including Avrakotos, were divorced. 'Everyone worked six and a half days a week, twelve to fourteen hours a day' he remembered. 'After work we only went out with Agency people. We drank with them, slept with them, and if you were lucky you'd get laid three times a week, always with an Agency person. And one Sunday a month, I'd head for Deale, Maryland, and eat crabs and smell salt water'. P280

Chapter Twenty One: Man of Destiny

Mike Vickers

When Mike Vickers arrived for his interview with Gust's team he was the lowly civil service equivalent of a captain in the army. He was thirty one and had just 18 months experience in the CIA. Avrakotos always used the informal network to recruit his officers: the secretaries of the Clandestine Services. He always believed they knew the real quality of the people up for jobs. The secretaries said Mike Vickers was special – the best writer in the branch, a near genius, and the target of jealousy in the paramilitary branch which hadn't even passed his name on as a candidate for the job.

- Ten years a Green Beret, the first five years on the NATO frontline studying the Soviets and preparing for guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines
- Special Forces Soldier of the Year
- Fluent in Czech and Spanish
- Officers Candidate School, second in class
- Training in demolition, light and heavy weapons, raids and ambushes, high-altitude free-fall parachuting, advanced mountain climbing
- Three years running counter terrorism missions out of Southern Command, Panama
- Career change at thirty when he entered the CIA's elite career-training programme

Taking on the boy wonder

Gust Avrakotos went to have a look at him in the Paramilitary unit. 'He was the only nerdy-looking guy in the whole group; most of those guys are Neanderthals, and he looked like a bookworm.' But he was what Avrakotos liked, 'an ethnic' and outsider. Grandchild of Slovaks and Italians. Vickers was unaware of the bureaucratic manoeuvres that Avrakotos had gone through to get him. His interview took thirty minutes, and while it would be an exaggeration to say that Avrakotos fell in love at first sight, it was close.

Guerrilla warfare expert

Avrakotos, a maths star himself, was mesmerized. This man seemed to have studied guerrilla warfare the way others study medicine. Gust could sense an exuberance behind the calm exterior, particularly when this utterly self-confident young man announced that he saw no reason why the mujahideen could not win. Avrakotos hired him on the spot and turned him loose to review the entire programme.

Results of Vickers's review

- No meaningful anti-aircraft capacity
- No modern communications
- No battlefield radios to co-ordinate attacks
- Few mortars
- Few anti-tank weapons
- No light machine guns
- No proper medical kits
- No boots
- Not enough food for the families
- No mine clearing devices
- No sniper rifles
- Far too few modern assault rifles

Everything needed to be re-thought with the weapons mix in mind, Vickers explained. He wanted to stop all purchases of obsolescent Enfield rifles and switch to AKs. They should think of the basic

mujahideen unit as a one-hundred-man force. Each of these units needed three Dashikas, more long-range mortars. By the time he finished describing the range of weapons and amount of ammunition that should be supplied; he was proposing heretofore unthinkable quantities and costs of ordnance. Vickers announced that to make a difference in the Afghan war, they should be prepared to ratchet up to a budget as high as \$1.2 billion a year.

The new budget projection

Gust quickly convened his team to challenge the numbers. The logistics man in particular was sceptical. But in the end the senior officers could fault little. To infuse the mujahideen with the kind of resources Vickers was calling for, he argued, would quickly turn them into year-round warriors. All they needed was enough ammunition, food for their families, medical kits, and a supply line to keep them in the field. With his remarkably low-key presentation, this warrior-strategist was quietly seizing controls of the programme by sheer force of logic. P301

Signing off on the plan

Luck was with Avrakotos; Chuck Cogan's successor was announced, and it was the rugged veteran case officer Bert Dunn. He was bowled over by Vickers's strategic plan and trusted Avrakotos to run the show. After Dunn signed off on the plan, the two men went upstairs to present it to Clair George. Once again fate played its hand. Dunn had worked with George for many years and stated 'If you endorse it Bert, it's okay with me.' But the Agency's top spy then suggested that the entire discussion was somewhat irrelevant because Congress would never give them the kind of money the plan called for.

Working on Wilson - weapons

Avrakotos had a problem. Charlie Wilson was only keen on buying the Oerlikons; his pet project. Avrakotos decided to break with protocol and bring Mike Vickers along to Wilson's office with him to plead the multi-weapon plan. Vickers convinced Wilson that by taking the war to the air against the Soviets (using surface-to-air missiles) the Soviets would be far less effective and wouldn't be able to terrorize the mujahideen on the ground.

Working on Wilson - funds

The day after Vickers's virtuoso performance, Avrakotos returned to Wilson's office and the two men talked money. With Wilson's help, the Afghan programme was now being funded at \$500 million, half of which was from Congress and half from Saudi matching funds. Avrakotos informed Wilson the might need more money.

Testing the corruption suspicions

The CIA had suspicions that Charlie Wilson had a financial interest in the Oerlikons, and may have been a corrupt politician. Avrakotos had to find out. While this was happening, Charlie announced that his friend Mohammed Abu Ghazala, the Egyptian defence minister had weapons to sell to bring down the Soviet gunships. Abu Ghazala was a friend of the US, but the Justice Department was reportedly investigating a shipping company that Abu Ghazala had set up to transport goods provided by US foreign assistance to Egypt. There were allegations of corruption. Avrakotos had to decide whether to go with Charlie to Egypt to see if Charlie was playing straight. He thought hard and agreed. P306

Chapter Twenty Two: Mohammed's Arms Bazaar

1984 general election

Charlie Wilson defeated his Republican opponent with ease; but Doc Long was defeated that year in spite of a \$600,000 war chest. This was a major setback for Israel, which lost its most well-positioned and fanatically supportive congressional patron. For Wilson, it meant he would have to champion Zia's aid package on the Foreign Operations subcommittee all by himself.

Charlie Wilson's new paramour

Joanne Herring had accepted a marriage proposal from a Houston millionaire, Lloyd Davis, a particularly suspicious Texan who didn't approve of Wilson and insisted his fiancée stop seeing him. As a consequence, Charlie lost his muse, but by then he was already swept up by the momentous forces that she had set in motion. Gust and Charlie agreed to fly to Cairo to test out Abu Ghazala's weapons, and Charlie decided he must take a suitable companion. He invited the pretty blonde congressional

secretary Trish Wilson, his date on the night of his hit-and-run accident. The coincidence of their shared surname would be helpful when booking rooms in the stricter Muslim states.

Another unsuitable companion

With Avrakotos suspicious antenna already sensitively tuned, he was alarmed to see Denis Neill along for the ride. Neill was a lobbyist for the Egyptian Defence Ministry. It was hard for Gust not to conclude that he was walking into a corrupt bit of wheeling and dealing. Gust tried to be diplomatic, explaining that there were rules to follow and he could not talk business with Neill in the room. Neill complied and Gust felt more relieved.

Wilson and Abu Ghazala's relationship

Charlie Wilson's amazingly intimate relationship with Abu Ghazala was another remarkable coincidence that seemed to shape the build-up of the Afghan war. As defense minister, Abu Ghazala was one of America's most important partisans in the Middle East, decidedly pro-US, and, above all, not fundamentalist. 'We were soul brothers in every way,' explains Wilson, 'Pussy, whiskey, and conversation.' P310

The arms demonstration

Abu Ghazala assured Avrakotos and Wilson that the perfect weapon for the Afghans was the mule-portable ZSU-23. Gust was dismayed to notice the lobbyist Neill also attended. The party (including Art Alper) drove out into the heat of the desert and sat at a collection of tables and umbrellas. Each table sported a lunch box filled with Kentucky Fried Chicken. The demonstration was a disaster.

- The Egyptians put the 600-pound base of the gun on wheels and several mules were harnessed to haul the dead weight up the long, steep incline
- (Gust) 'Those fucking mules started going backward. They were in danger of going ass over head backward, whereupon twenty Egyptians appeared from nowhere trying to hold the mules and push them back. They almost lost all the Egyptians as well' P313
- Finally, after repeated tries and failures, Wilson himself ordered an end to the exercise

The happy conclusion to first the corruption test

Avrakotos turned to Wilson and said, 'Charlie, I can't buy it.' Without missing a beat Wilson responded, 'You're right.' In Gust's mind, Charlie had just passed the first ethics test. He wasn't trying to pressure the Agency into buying a weapon that wouldn't work for the Afghans. They moved on to the second test.

Second corruption test

Abu Ghazala assured Charlie that he had eight hundred Soviet SA-7s (shoulder-fired anti-aircraft weapons) left over from the Yom Kippur War. The local CIA station had tipped off Gust that the Egyptians tended not to maintain their old weapons well. Avrakotos, still worried that Wilson might try to put the fix in had said, 'Charlie, if the SAMs are operational, I'll buy them. But if they're not, I don't want to hear another fucking word.' They weren't. All were sitting in dust-filled warehouses, on dusty, dirty floors. The wires were burned out and the connections were no good. Charlie immediately agreed not to buy any weapon that wouldn't work and Gust put his suspicions behind him. From then on he realised that Charlie's intentions in the Afghan war were purely honourable.

Egyptian Special Warfare School

Mohammed's arms bazaar may not have been successful, but the real eye-opener was when the Egyptians invited the Agency and Charlie to meet the counter-insurgency experts. The CIA's military team soon discovered a whole range of low-level weapons they wanted for the jihad, like Egyptian limpet mines that Alper later modified so they could be attached magnetically to Soviet trucks heading down the Salang Highway. The Agency also found the Katyusha here: a rocket with a range of over ten kilometres that could not be traced to the US or NATO. Gust bought every one of Mohammed's Katyushas, at tens of thousands each and by February 1985 he had commissioned the Egyptians to open up a production line of them, ordering seven hundred of them by year's end.

Summary of the shopping trip

'We did in one month with Charlie what would have taken us nine years to accomplish,' claimed Gust. And thanks to Charlie, Gust was able to build his own storage facilities at Port Suez and then send Egyptians to the US for training as production inspectors. Once, Wilson decided that a major crisis over

quality control was too big to be dealt with by phone, so he invited Mohammed for a weekend at a lodge in the pine woods of East Texas.

Before his tour of duty was over, Gust would place orders for tens of millions of dollars' worth of weapons. The consignments grew so large that he bought a special ship to move them in containers to Karachi. For the next two years he was treated like a visiting monarch whenever he went to Egypt. And because of his expanding business with the Chinese, he was able to drive prices down to half the going black-market rate. P321

Chapter Twenty Three: The Senator and His Even crazier Right-Wing Friends

Senator Gordon Humphrey

The timing of Charlie and Gust's close relationship could not have been better. They had put things in place for a strong arms shipment to the Afghans; but on December 26, 1984 the CIA came under attack from the conservative Senator Gordon Humphrey. Not knowing about the secret work, he claimed the CIA was playing a role so wimpish in its support of the Afghans that it verged on betrayal of the freedom fighters. The senator added many embellishments; mismanagement, incompetence, lack of will, failure to honour the president's commitment.... The CIA was in no position to defend itself against Humphrey's charge of betrayal. Covert operations are considered state secrets at Langley, not to be commented on, even in the face of ignorant or damaging claims.

He didn't sit on any of the committees that oversee the CIA, but out of fear of his access to the president... the Agency chose to deal with him as if he were a full member of the Intelligence Committee. P326

Humphrey's Afghan Task Force

For the next six years, Afghanistan would become Humphrey's all-consuming passion. Within weeks of his debut he would create a congressional 'Afghan Task Force', and, anointing himself chairman, would then preside over unofficial hearings on the state of the CIA's war. Almost immediately he would become better known than Charlie Wilson as the American champion of the cause. His method of support was so exceedingly bizarre that the Pakistan ambassador, Jamsheed Marker, would observe privately that Gordon Humphrey 'was a most embarrassing friend'.

- He committed over 60 percent of the efforts of his Senate staff to Afghanistan
- His aides ground out a constant flow of accusatory letters to the CIA, State, AID, Pentagon and White House demanding more action and explanation for failures
- Gust's office was obliged to spend hours, even days a week just answering the Senator's questions
- He joined forces with Andrew Eiva, the maniacally energetic Lithuanian-American who always had access to the press and media to push his anti-CIA, pro-mujahideen cause
- Humphrey and Eiva's criticisms led the Pentagon to consider taking the Afghan operation away from the CIA altogether and running it themselves

Other members of the loony Right

There was the Washington-based Committee for a Free Afghanistan, originally led by an intimidating former army officer, Karen McKay. Two other equally formidable women worked out of a respected New York foundation, Freedom House: Rosanne Klass and Ludmilla Thorne. They fought amongst themselves often; but Charlie Wilson's political antenna told him it would be highly dangerous to cross any of these zealots. He always made it a point to see them all whenever they called, to offer encouragement but diplomatically avoid signing on publicly with any of them.

Charlie's distraction tactics

There was an element of duplicity in Wilson's dealings here. In truth, it suited him just fine to have these crazies moving menacingly around the fringes hurling virtual bombs and attacking bureaucrats. It didn't hurt to have the bureaucrats feel the pressure. On occasion, when he sensed resistance at State or the Agency, he would deliberately stir Eiva up. P329

Ironically, the only real impact of all these hard-right assaults may have been to give the programme the cover it absolutely needed. P338

Avrakotos's dog and pony show

Charlie may have been happy to let Humphrey snap and snarl, but Avrakotos saw that the CIA's credibility and right to continue its escalating operation was in jeopardy. So he put Mike Vickers in charge of co-opting the senator. They started with a show at the Agency's Camp Peary training ground. Its whole aim was intimidation.

They had the arsenal displayed, brought in para-militaries to tell of their experience with training the mujahideen and exploded some particularly lethal mines. At one point the senator asked if Avrakotos could account for all the money and weapons being given to the Pakistanis and Afghans. 'We can't. Can you account for all the money going into New Hampshire from the federal government?' Avrakotos asked in return. 'We use satellites as best we can. We put beacons on some packages and various crates, and overhead we study what happens to the shipments. And we do a pretty good job of it. Avrakotos claims that eventually, Gordon Humphrey had been largely neutralised.

More loonies

For Avrakotos, 1985 was a year of right-wing craziness. Next came a band of well-placed anti-Communists from within the government that had a plan they believed would bring down the Red Army. Its leading advocate was Richard Perle at the Pentagon, nicknamed 'the Prince of Darkness. Oliver North also checked in briefly, but the man who set Avrakotos's teeth on edge the most was Walt Raymond, another NSC staffer who had spent twenty years with the CIA as a propagandist.

The Vlasov plan

Their plan was to encourage Soviet officers and soldiers to defect to the mujahideen. This vision was based on Vlasov's army, a German-backed effort during WWII to persuade Communist soldiers to join an anti-Stalinist front. It had a limited victory. But the idea of any Soviets wanting to defect to the Afghans who routinely tortured their victims was ludicrous. Avrakotos argued against it, and eventually the Agency backed him up.

Chapter Twenty Four: Techno Holy Warriors

The only game in town

By 1985 Gust Avrakotos's Afghan programme was getting over 50 percent of the CIA's entire Operations budget. And he had the uncomfortable feeling of junior staffers calling him Sir. After twenty years of being an outsider, it was as if this former renegade was finally part of the establishment of the Directorate of Operations.

Trouble with Saudi money

Once again in 1985, the Saudis were late on their payments. Avrakotos urged the director to go personally to collect, and Casey had invited Gust along for the ten-thousand-mile flight in his huge C-141 Staflifter, a kind of flying hotel with a planetary-range communications centre. They got their money, and the surprising feature of the Saudi grant was that the king did not dictate terms. He was content to let the CIA use money as it saw fit.

Gust's new status

By the time Avrakotos returned to Langley, he knew he had won more than a massive increase of the Afghan war budget. He now possessed the mystique of having travelled alone on a secret mission with the director. The seventh floor now had to adjust to the likelihood that Avrakotos and Casey had a private understanding. The director's mumbles could be interpreted to mean almost anything, and Avrakotos, confident that no one would go to Casey to check, was fully prepared to exploit the situation to the hilt. 'If I had a problem I'd say, Casey called me; that's not what he wants.' P342

Gorbachev and Zaitzev enter the frame

Zia and foreign minister Yaqub Khan were in Moscow for Chernenko's funeral when Gorbachev all but threatened to destroy their country if they did not halt support for the mujahideen. Zia looked Gorbachev straight in the eye and insisted that his country was not involved.

Next Gorbachev put General Mikhail Zaitzev in charge of the Afghan campaign. This legendary officer (invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968) showed that the Soviets were committed to prevailing no matter

what the cost. The 40th Army took to the offensive everywhere, and Zaitzev introduced thousands of elite Spetsnaz troops into the fighting. And by the fall of 1985 many Western analysts seemed to think the Soviets were on the verge of pulling it off. P343

Valentin Varennikov

Zaitzev's most lethal figure was Valentin Varennikov. He was an authentic war hero who was given the honour as a young captain at the end of WWII of presenting a captured Nazi flag to Stalin. His mission was to defeat the enemy under Zaitzev's orders, and he worked hard at saturation bombing the Afghans into submission. But what Gorbachev and Varennikov had no way of knowing that spring was that they were moving too little too late. Back in Langley, Avrakotos had his own personal General Varennikov in place, thirty-two-year old Mike Vickers, and Vickers was going to turn out to be the better general. And before the year was out, the cost to the Soviet Special Forces would be enormous.

Vickers's techno-guerrillas

- Vickers's first cut off four hundred thousand of the mujahideen from the Agency's main support programme
- He decided to create an elite force of 150,000, betting everything on this new army within an army
- Those who didn't make the cut into the elite would be treated merely as militia
- He began organising 20 different courses to train the new techno-guerrillas in all warfare disciplines
- They were taught not only how to fire their new weapons but how to work together in combat and how to mount a range of different kinds of operations, from urban sabotage to huge, combined-arms ambushes
- The Agency began sending in frequency-hopping radios and burst transmitters so they could communicate with ISI in Pakistan instantly
- They were supplied with combat walkie-talkies and most importantly with noise sensors that could alert when a gunship was approaching (one of Art Alper's special toys)

Mohammed Yousaf

The ISI brigadier responsible for arming the Afghans with the CIA's weapons was Mohammed Yousaf, a big bug-eyed, former infantry officer who maintained a very complicated relationship with the Americans. A fundamentalist Muslim, Yousaf bore considerable suspicion and even bitter resentment against the CIA. Even though President Zia was the ultimate authority in Pakistan, but Yousaf felt it was his obligation to decide how much to permit the Americans to force down Pakistan's throat, and he emerged in those months as a genuine block to the massive increases Vickers had in mind. His official explanation was that he did not want to do anything that would precipitate a Soviet invasion of his enemy. P351

Amateur theatrics

The CIA didn't help by inviting him to Washington; blindfolding him before taking him to the 'sabotage school', they drank bourbon throughout a meal he attended at the Four Seasons Hotel and Avrakotos bickered with him. They then unthinkingly sent him off to attend a theatrical production of *Godspell*. All was not lost however, as Yousaf had great respect for Avrakotos's boss Bert Dunn. And he was pleased to receive Dunn's praise for all he was doing for the jihad. But he didn't want the CIA to ship the huge amount of ammunition that Vickers felt was necessary to keep the fighters in steady combat.

Impasse breached

Avrakotos saved the day with a bit of baksheesh distributed skilfully at just the right moment. Brigadier Raza, the Pakistan ISI general who had held Yousaf's job during Howard Hart's tour suggested Avrakotos should consider giving a contract for ammunition to a certain Pakistani arms manufacturer. They did this and the problem was solved.

Mules

The next problem Avrakotos had to solve was that of the mules. Because of the mule's strategic importance in transporting all the ammunition and arms across the border, the Russians placed the highest priority on hunting down and slaughtering the mujahideen's long mule caravans. So many of these beasts were wiped out by gunships that in 1985, an urgent call came into the task force headquarters warning of a crisis that had placed everything at risk. 'Where the fuck do you go to buy

donkeys?' Avrakotos remembers asking Vickers. Later an incredulous CIA director called Avrakotos. 'You've got to be kidding me. You're buying mules?'

The experiences of the CIA buying and shipping mules to Afghanistan over the next few years became the subject of legendary stories in the halls of Langley. They tried local Pakistani mules, Egyptian ones, Brazilian ones, and eventually took to using Tennessee mules.

Corruption

The next drama was the major policy review demanded by Gordon Humphrey and his cohorts. They were concerned that crude corruption was at play and the mujahideen were being starved of the arms and ammunition stolen by the Pakistani intermediaries. Vickers was set to work to show how they placed tiny sensors in random shipments of weapons, which was followed by satellite, to see where they ultimately went. Spies were recruited from among the mujahideen themselves, as well as from the ranks of the Pakistani military. Finally, the Agency also ran a network of fifteen 'third-country agents', Europeans operating inside the war zone under the cover of being foreign journalists, doctors, or documentary filmmakers. They reported how the mujahideen were doing militarily, as well as whether the money, food and arms shipments were getting through. Beyond that, satellites were now regularly being used to verify Afghan claims of downed planes and tanks. P356

National Security Decision Directive

The President endorsed Avrakotos and Dunn's policy and signed off on the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 166. The object of the CIA's campaign, he wrote, was now to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan 'by all means available.' P356

Chapter Twenty Five: 'The Noblest Smuggling Operation in History'

Charlie Schnabel

In the first week of 1985 Wilson hired a new administrative assistant, fifty-five-year-old Texan Charlie Schnabel. Technically, he was supposed to spend his days watching over the congressman's staff and making sure legislation was being tended to and constituents' problems were being solved. It may be hard to believe that anyone could outdo Charlie Wilson when it came to the art of rule-breaking, but Charlie Schnabel turned out to be every bit his boss's equal and then some.

Schnabel was an obsessed hunter and was reluctant to leave Texas. Wilson lured Schnabel to replace Simpson by tempting him with hunting everywhere. 'Don't worry about the hunting. I'm on the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, and anywhere in the world where we have a defense facility you can fly there and hunt. They'll take care of you.' P359

Wilson and Schnabel's Afghan plan

When it came to all things to do with Afghanistan, Wilson's relationship with Schnabel was eccentric in the extreme. The two never really co-ordinated their efforts and Wilson rarely chose to include Schnabel in his CIA dealings. But he always encouraged his administrative assistant's Afghan interests, and before long, the two men had worked out an implicit understanding of the rules of engagement they would follow. P360

Rules of engagement

Schnabel had Wilson's blessing to intimidate bureaucrats in his name: he could smuggle contraband to the mujahideen; he could also write letters requesting unusual assistance from, say, the Pakistan intelligence service, and sign them 'Charles Wilson'. As Schnabel's passion for the Afghan cause grew, he came to operate with such frequency and effectiveness that Abdul Haq, one of the legendary Afghan commanders remarked. 'We used to think of the two Charlies as one.' In a sense he became the dark side of Charlie Wilson, free to operate but with the implicit understanding that if he got into trouble he was on his own. P361

Agency for International Development (AID)

Charlie Schnabel took himself off to clandestine operations with the mujahideen at the first opportunity. And his success with them came not from the CIA's arena, but rather from his relationship with the Agency for International Development (AID).

Gerald Helman

The State Department official initially responsible for setting up this effort, known as the Cross Border Humanitarian Aid Programme, was Assistant Secretary of State Gerald Helman. In 1985 the conservative, anti-Communist revolution was in full swing. The State Department's leaders noted that Congress, through Charlie Wilson's Oerlikon bill, had earmarked money to provide humanitarian aid to the mujahideen; and the Cross Border programme, under the umbrella of AID began. It was initially conceived as a modest programme to smuggle food and some medical care across the border – a total of \$6 million for 1985. AID leadership were reluctant to get involved with what looked like a covert operation funded by the CIA. P364

The Cross Border Programme and Dr Bob Simon

But the Cross Border programme happened to come on-line just as Wilson had decided to use his appropriations muscle to fund an effort devised by a California doctor – a friend of Charles Fawcett's – to train and send cadres of combat medics into Afghanistan. This zealous figure, Dr Bob Simon, had already enlisted hundreds of American volunteers, doctors and nurses who were to teach the Afghans how to care for their wounded and ill.

State Department digs in

The task of explaining to Wilson why it was not going to be possible to fund this doctor was given to Gerald Helman. He explained it was too risky to expose Americans to danger and perhaps cause them to be taken hostage. They argued and Wilson finally summoned Under Secretary of State Michael Armacost to this office for a showdown. Under secretaries are particularly solicitous of the few senior members of the Foreign Operations subcommittee. There can be terrible problems if one of these representatives decides to seek vengeance. Wilson went at him by reminding him of the president's intentions to help the wounded mujahideen. Soon after, Helman was relieved of his responsibilities for the Cross Border Programme, and organised a grant of \$600,000 to set up operations in Peshawar close to the border. P366

Larry Crandall

The new replacement on the programme was the bureaucratic gunslinger Larry Crandall. Another of those self-appointed crusaders who somehow found themselves being pulled into Charlie Wilson's orbit. He quickly set to work shaking up the AID by buying hundreds of brand-new four wheel drive cars and trucks which he promptly presented to the leading Afghan commanders. He was the first American in the whole theatre of the covert war to have a direct contact with the Afghans. For the first time, a US government official was talking and negotiating with the warriors the CIA had been arming for five years. The programme was technically overt and would grow to over \$100 million a year. P367

AID as a second front

Avrakotos tends to dismiss Crandall's efforts as inept and clogged with bureaucracy, but the truth is that this programme fast became a critical second front in the CIA's war.

- He got food and medicine to the local Afghanistans and gave a reason for the people to stay in their villages
- He took to smuggling in a big way: with trucks and mules and camels to slip in food and medicine
- He organised training for teachers and supplied kits for them to establish underground schools in devastated villages
- He doled out millions to the private volunteer organisations that provided American nurses, doctors and health workers inside the war zone and in the refugee camps in Peshawar
- He created a visual reminder in the refugee camps that the Americans were helping their struggle

Crandall the star

Wilson would soon come to love this man. Schnabel would arrange for Crandall's daughter to intern in Wilson's office. The congressman would throw fancy parties for him on his return visits, and above all, Charlie would conspire with Crandall against his bosses at AID who were determined to kill this programme. P369

Charlie's blunt threat

When an official told Wilson that he was offering far too much money for the Cross Border Programme and that AID did not feel it could assimilate it, Wilson cut him off. 'Every time you talk, I'm going to take \$15 million from a place where you want to be spending it, and I'll add that \$15 million to the

Afghan programme.’ The programme which had begun at \$6 million in 1985, leapt to \$15 million in 1986; to \$30 million in 1987; to \$45 million in 1988; and finally topped out at \$90 million in 1989.

Green light for Crandall

With Wilson’s support, Crandall began building highways and bridges in Afghanistan so that ordnance could be moved in days, rather than months, to supply Massoud in the Panjshir Valley. He was sending in huge amounts of wheat, much more than needed, knowing that the Afghans would sell it to generate operating funds. He next took over the business of supplying the Tennessee mules, officially to carry humanitarian cargo only. But naturally arms and ammunition went over the border as well. Word was getting out that giant cargo planes landed at night and disgorged incredible amounts of US goods for the mujahideen. ‘Three years in a row, Charlie doubled my budget,’ remembers Crandall. ‘He would always say, what do you need? There are no limits.’ P372

Crandall and the CIA war sessions

The most telling indicator that the Cross Border Programme’s relevance was the station chief’s invitation for Crandall to sit in on the CIA’s war sessions. Since Crandall’s men were the only Americans dealing directly with the mujahideen, Crandall was able to offer better tactical advice on how long it would take to get supplies to a given commander, or what tribes were likely to hijack a caravan, or who would take bribes from the Red Army, or which mujahideen was doing the most fighting. P371. Eventually the AID programme served as a Trojan horse of sorts for the CIA. Operating with its innocent cover, the programme would soon merge directly into the CIA’s operation.

Chapter Twenty Six: Dr Doom Declares Charlie Dead

Wilson’s self-destruct button

By early 1985 things with the Afghan campaign were going so close to perfection, and Wilson’s self-destruct button was pressed: he went to work to spoil it all in some sort of Freudian impulse that seemed to prompt him to create havoc. As usual, the incident was connected with a woman. He met Annelise Ilschenko at a black-tie White House reception for Kennedy Centre board members. She was on the arms of another colleague, but he soon wooed her and ‘Sweetums’ as Zia, Gust and all CIA station chiefs all over the world soon began to know her, entered his life.

Scandal at sea

To impress his new love, a Miss World beauty queen, he invited her to join him onboard the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* which was hosting a bash for the Defense Appropriations committee delegation. Wilson took with him some Texan drinking buddies and his young defense aide Molly Hamilton, to keep Annelise company on board. Word got out about the junket, and a columnist on the *Washington Post* spelled out in humiliating detail how the congressman had taken a beauty queen for a weekend boondoggle at the taxpayer’s expense. Sweetums’ parents were not impressed. And Wilson personally apologised to them and magnanimously offered to pay the navy \$650 for Annelise’s expenses. To win her affection he then suggested another junket in Paris and Marrakech.

Sweetums’ first foreign junket

Her first trip with Charlie Wilson abroad ended in disaster. Charlie was on a fact-finding trip to Morocco to evaluate the Royal Moroccan Army’s weapons in the desert. He began to feel chest pains when he couldn’t swim across the La Mamounia pool. He put it down to intestinal problems. But later in Paris he suffered an attack after coming out of a restaurant. A lifetime of drink had finally caught up with Charlie Wilson. His heart was literally soaked in alcohol and barely functioning, a condition not uncommon to alcoholics.

Charlie Wilson in hospital

He was sent first to the American hospital in Paris and then evacuated to the military hospital at Rhine Main in Germany for treatment. He was there ten days in a critical condition when he found himself being told there was a call from the White House. The president needed him in Washington. Would he fly home immediately to cast a vote for Ronald Reagan to save the contras?

Charlie Wilson's command performance

For an anti-communist from East Texas, this was a command performance. A giant air force plane was flown to Germany with a medical team on board to carry the congressman across the Atlantic to rescue the Nicaraguan 'freedom fighters'.

It was a critical moment for the Contra war, a congressional face-off where two or three votes would make a difference. When two of Wilson's liberal colleagues spotted him being wheeled onto the floor of the House in his navy pyjamas and sustained by an IV, they ran over and threatened to unplug his life-support system if he didn't vote right. Charlie felt heroic enough to bark them down with his typical banter. 'They had to fly my skinny ass all the way from Germany to keep you pinkos from wiping out freedom in Central America' he said. It was hard for anyone to be upset with Charlie no matter what he did. Not even Tip O'Neill would ask this famous war hawk to turn down a direct appeal from the president. P382

Charlie's medical condition

Charlie was informed that his alcohol soaked heart was functioning at only 16 percent. If he didn't stop drinking he would be dead in eighteen months. He sought a second opinion and the prognosis was confirmed. He called all his closest women friends - Sweetums, Snowflake, Ziva and Trish - and was assured that his girlfriends wouldn't desert him if he had to go on the wagon.

Concern at the CIA

Gust Avrakotos was alarmed. He understood the importance of Charlie's continued good health. The fate of the entire Afghan programme was linked to Charlie Wilson. He went straight to Bethesda Naval Hospital where Charlie Wilson was being treated. He appeared at Charlie's bedside with a giant bottle of Scotch, a package of condoms, and a stunning secret satellite photograph showing fifteen Soviet MiGs destroyed on the Shindand air base in Afghanistan. It was an amazing victory for the mujahideen.

Charlie the new man

Charlie left hospital in late June a changed man. He knew he could not drink but he could channel all his energies draining the last drop of Russian blood out of Afghanistan. 'I was still thinking there had to be a way to shoot down those fucking helicopters, and I was going to find it.' P386

Chapter Twenty Seven: Charlie's Irregulars

Vaughn Forest's proposition

Just a few weeks after Charlie left hospital, Charlie Schnabel urged Wilson to meet one of his new people, one of the oddball characters of the American Afghan lobby: Vaughn Forest. This former Florida cop, Knight of Malta and Vietnam Special Forces medic had just returned from a month-long trek into the Afghan war zone. His credentials as a Knight of Malta had put him in touch with CIA chief Casey and Ed Juchniewicz who recommended him to Wilson. Forest mentioned the need for high-tech, user-friendly weapons for the mujahideen, and said that he had discovered a group of weapons tinkers in the Pentagon's Tactical Land Warfare Division who were keen to give it a go.

Vaughn Forest was so low on the Washington totem pole that he hadn't even been able to get anyone at the Pentagon to listen to him, much less think how to get Congress to fund a programme to design and produce lightweight exotic killing devices. Charlie Wilson would turn to his fellow appropriators to shortcut the system and turn Forest's vision into a reality. Within a few weeks of hearing Forest's implausible proposition, Charlie emerged from a House-Senate Appropriations conference with a commitment to fund the most unconventional weapons programme of the decade. P390

The Weapons Upgrade Programme

One of the more unusual features of this programme was a clause that exempted it from having to follow the rules and regulations that guide all of the Pentagons' other weapons procurement and development programmes. It was such a radical departure that Wilson knew it would have no chance of being implemented unless it first won endorsement of the secretary of defense, Caspar Weinberger. P390

Caspar Weinberger

Charlie had got to know Caspar through some of Joanna's carefully orchestrated dinner parties. Beyond that, for almost four years, in spite of being a liberal Democrat, Charlie had been a critical ally on the Defence Appropriations subcommittee, voting for each and every item in Reagan's massive arms build-up. At one hearing, he's even told Weinberger, 'Mr Secretary, there are a lot of things I don't understand and some with which I don't agree. But because you say they are important, I'm going to vote for them all.' As Charlie saw it, the bottom line was that he had done a lot for Weinberger, and it was time to cash in his chips. P390

The Weapons Upgrade Deal

At breakfast with the defense secretary, Wilson began by saying, 'All I want is \$10 million' – but then came the catch. He wanted the Pentagon to give the programme a complete waiver on all red tape – no specs, no feasibility studies, no minority contracts, not even competitive bidding. There was no time. Weinberger initially expressed concern about the legality of the programme, but eventually agreed.

The rest – getting the trusty staffers on the subcommittee to conceal the appropriation in a line item that no one would ever find – was hardly a challenge. Wilson was beginning to feel like M in a James Bond novel. He originally intended the CIA to run it, but Avrakotos wanted no part of it. So the programme went to the Pentagon and would be run by them, but actually most of the work was done by Wilson himself. Vaughn Forest and Charlie Schnabel would also become intimately involved. P392

The Barnard Brothers

Chuck Barnard and his brother gravitated to the programme. They were the tinkerers who began to develop an astonishing collection of weapons. The tinkerers turned out to be wildly productive, in large part because they weren't restrained by any of the normal bureaucratic controls. But the downside of this freedom became painfully evident on when a freelance tinkerer (Colonel Bill Dilger) on his way to Charlie's office to demonstrate a weapon he had designed, blew up a Texaco gas station not far from the capital. P394

The Texaco gas station incident

For a moment it looked as though the incident might bring down the entire operation. As chance would have it, Dilger had met Charlie Schnabel and Vaughn Forest for lunch to rehearse the presentation about his portable, single-shot, long-range tank destroyer, later that day. After several drinks the exuberant inventor had insisted on showing off his wondrous device, which was in the back on his Dodge pickup. He boasted about its lethal characteristics and for some reason had loaded the huge gun with live ammunition. It appears that it inadvertently fell when he left it propped up on a pedestal in the back of his truck at the gas station. The live shell discharged and had gone straight through a truck, two gas pumps and into another car before the entire station went up in flames. Dilger fled the scene, but left behind his weapons manual which had been translated into Pashtun. Naturally the media and then the police believed they had a terrorist attack. Dilger went back to reclaim the manual and confess, and was arrested.

A sensitive and complicated set of negotiations followed. Dilger was forced to sell his house to cover the legal bills. The Pentagon paid off the two wounded bystanders. Miraculously, Wilson and the programme managed to avoid the scandal.

Shipping the weapons to Afghanistan

Forest looked into the law and discovered that the Pentagon could give away as much of this 'surplus' arms and ammunition, invented by the Programme, just so long as the gift was for 'humanitarian assistance'. Next challenge was to find a way to transport the goods to Afghanistan. He came up with a truly innovative proposition. Each month, he told Wilson, US Air Force reserve pilots spent hours flying huge, empty C5A transporters in continental-length circles to maintain their flight proficiency. Why not have them fill the C5s with surplus and task the reserve pilots and navigators to put in their time flying 'humanitarian-aid shipments' to Pakistan? Charlie agreed, and called on his Foreign Operations subcommittee to insert an extra \$10 million into the State Department's open budget to fund the programme.

Charlie Schnabel would eventually treat these humanitarian shipments as his private airline, flying into Pakistan twelve times.

Bringing wounded heroes home

Charlie Schnabel went one step further. Apart from bringing back Afghan rugs, fur coats, captured Red Army memorabilia for the boss and his friends, he hit upon the idea of bringing back wounded mujahideen soldiers for medical treatment. This was the beginning of a sometimes touching, sometimes ludicrous chapter in the war, in which Charlie Wilson caused America to open its arms to exotic freedom fighters. Even Joanne Herring came out of 'retirement' to welcome the first load of wounded heroes in Houston. Naturally there were problems bringing fundamentalist mountain men to hospitals run by nurses in short dresses, offered American food, and not separated along lines of tribal divisions. Fights broke out, knives were brandished, and Charlie had a great deal of trouble separating them and keeping the propaganda story on the right track. He succeeded.

Chapter Twenty Eight: The Silver Bullet

The Stinger factory

From Los Angeles airport, the Stinger factory at the General Dynamic's plant, is one hour's drive east on the Santa Monica freeway towards the mountains. By the fall of 1985, the ladies of Rancho Cucamonga were busy inside Building 600, assembling the silver bullet that would soon wreak havoc on the Red Army in Afghanistan. The ladies normally pulled eight-hour shifts assembling the Stingers, but in 1985 the weapon was considered so vital that the work in Building 600 continued around the clock.

Assembling a Stinger

The building was like a hospital operating room; the women and few men worked with tiny gyroscopes and miniature motors. The whole exercise was exceedingly delicate, but miraculously what emerged at the end was a thirty-five pound dark green tube that could be dropped on the ground, frozen, thrown in a lake, or kept for around ten years. They were designed for American soldiers to use, but they were sufficiently user-friendly to make it possible for a simple man with no technical knowledge to put the tube on his shoulder, get a MiG or helicopter in his sights, pull the trigger and bring down a \$20 million jet fighter or gunship. P404

It is a 'fire-and-forget' weapon. Its infrared sensors seek heat for the exhaust of aircraft, lock on and explode. P427

Stinger's introduction to the Afghan war

The Stinger was no secret to Charlie or Gust. They knew it was the best mule-portable plane killer in the world. But in 1985 the CIA was adamant about not introducing an American weapon. Both Charlie and eventually Gust were obsessed with finding a silver bullet to help the mujahideen. Vickers of course assured them both that the mix of weapons would win the war, but Charlie in particular was still romantically obsessed with his dream. One day Gust met a twisted old Agency veteran named Sam, who told him he could build a Stinger from scratch using cannibalized parts. (Sam's son was killed in the Vietnam War.) What Sam described was an amalgam of all the anti-aircraft missiles in operation, from the Blowpipe, the Redeye and the Stinger. The only problem, acknowledged Sam, was with the patents. 'Fuck the patents. This is a covert war,' Gust told him. 'Let them sue us.' P406

Reprogramming Pentagon funds

In the fall of 1985 Charlie Wilson appeared to Gust and Vickers and asked them an almost ludicrous question: 'Could you use another \$300 million?' The congressman was operating out of his subcommittee like a political alchemist, looking about for ways to magically expand Gust's budget. On this occasion he had just discovered a \$300 million warfare programme that the Pentagon had decided to abandon. If the money wasn't spent by the end of the fiscal year, just eight days away, the full \$300 million would revert to the Treasury. Charlie told Gust he figured he could persuade the Pentagon to give it up for Afghanistan if the CIA could be convinced to ask for it.

Reprogramming Pentagon funds was the way Wilson had paid for all of his special gifts to Gust. The chances of pulling off such an immense diversion of moneys into a covert programme was by normal standards, quite impossible. Gust figured it would take at least nine months. Charlie set to work.

- The Pentagon at first didn't want to give the money up. But Charlie threatened to cut \$3bn from their budget if they didn't comply
- The CIA had to be united and ask for the money: George, Casey and McMahon agreed

- Charlie next had to convince eight separate committees to divert such a large sum to Langley. ‘Let’s make this a Vietnam for the Soviets,’ Charlie would implore. And they concurred
- On day five, Charlie was told the House Intelligence Committee was in a seven-to-seven deadlock and the chairman, Lee Hamilton, intended to let the programme die. Charlie sought out Tip O’Neill
- Tip O’Neill leaned on Hamilton and the committee approved the funds
- Gust’s finance guru Hilly Billy now set to work and managed to get the funds wired by midnight on the deadline date
- Gust and Casey then flew off to Saudi Arabia to get the matched \$300 million from the Saudis

Evading press scrutiny

The Wilson-Avrakotos partnership had now managed to elevate the Agency’s Afghan programme beyond the normal budgetary control of Congress. Inexplicably, no one on the Hill – much less in the press – seemed to know about or pay attention to his dubious achievement, in spite of the hyperactive scrutiny that Wilson’s liberal colleagues were subjecting the Agency to about the flagging Contra operation. P413

Alerting the president

The huge budget increase meant that Avrakotos had no choice but to prepare a detailed report, known as a memorandum of notification (MON) to alert the president to the fundamental change in the nature of the Afghan operation. Vickers prepared the detailed report; Avrakotos reviewed it and sent it up to the seventh floor. Even the cautious John McMahon endorsed this call for an all-out secret war – the CIA was going for broke.

Getting a piece of the action

1985 and the CIA’s war was now going six years. Suddenly Afghanistan no longer looked like a sideshow. The bureaucrats from State, the Pentagon, and the NSC who gathered in room 208 of the Old Executive Office Building were now all demanding a right to get in on the action. The CIA wasn’t about to share, but they did bring up the idea of the silver bullet. P415

Mike Pillsbury

The Pentagon’s deputy undersecretary in charge of overseeing covert programmes became an early convert to the Afghan cause. He had repeatedly asked the National Security Council to approve the introduction of the American-made Stinger into the conflict. He was repeatedly thwarted. And eventually he convinced the Room 208 Committee that the CIA must have lost its way, as it was not backing the Stinger. The members went public in their accusations, but the CIA had to maintain its silence.

Green light for the Stinger

Pillsbury was so obsessed, he arranged for the entire 208 Committee to fly to Pakistan to lobby Zia to endorse the effort to deploy the Stinger. With a delegation of Senators present, Zia’s green light had a major impact on the debate in Washington. P419

Soon after the trip, Pillsbury’s boss, Fred Ikle, persuaded the Joint Chiefs to drop their objections, and with that the CIA lifted its opposition. President Reagan next signed off on the request and the ladies of Building 600 went to work.

Concerns about Zia

According to Wilson, there still remained the question of whether Zia would be willing to deploy the Stinger, risking Soviet fury by removing this last fig leaf from the American secret war. Charlie flew over to work on him. The Stinger, he said, would become a symbol of the special relationship that he had forged between the two countries. It would further cement the bond between Zia and the Reagan administration, and in turn, Charlie had said, it would make it far easier for him to continue to increase US military and economic assistance to Pakistan. P420

The Islamic bomb

Wilson’s importance to Zia and Pakistan went beyond the extra money. Every year the Appropriations subcommittee members fought a battle royal over charges that Pakistan was actively pursuing an Islamic bomb. And every year Wilson, sometimes single-handedly, beat back those accusations. The fact is, Pakistan *was* working on the bomb, and Wilson, the CIA, and almost everyone else knew.

Furthermore, it was not about to stop. Zia knew that as long as Pakistan was backing the mujahideen, Charlie Wilson would be with them. P421

Chapter Twenty Nine: The Other Silver Bullet

Milt Bearden

Howard Hart had left as station chief in Pakistan. He was replaced first by Bill Piekney then by Milt Bearden, a genial and tough Texan who arrived in 1986. He was thrilled to discover that the American press corps wasn't going to ask any questions. Bearden couldn't figure out why no one seemed to care the CIA was running the biggest operation in its history. The only thing the reporters seemed to want to do was get an Afghan to take them into the war zone for an adventure of being with the mujahideen in the Hindu Kush.

Mujahideen success

The mujahideen were shelling Kabul virtually every day by the time Bearden arrived on the scene. (And managed, by sheer coincidence, to blow up the biggest Soviet arms depot in Afghanistan in August 1986). And a select few were being trained in firing the Stinger. Bearden supervised the training, and made sure that one of the Afghan's most successful gunners, Engineer Ghaffar, learned how to use it. Ghaffar was a member of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's arch-fundamentalist Hezb-i-Islami party. He wasn't a fan of the Americans, but he took a Stinger and tried it out.

Ghaffar's Stinger demonstration

On September 26, 1986 Ghaffar and his men approached the Jalalabad airfield, sighted his shouldered weapon and aimed at four Hind helicopters flying in to land. He fired and brought one down. Then another, and another. The CIA satellite at first light sailed over the Hindu Kush and took pictures of the tangled gunships at the end of the Jalalabad runway. Minutes later a call from the Afghan task force went into Charlie Wilson: three Hinds have been shot down. The Stinger works.

Stinger repercussions

According to CIA estimates, seven out of every times a mujahid fired a Stinger, a helicopter or airplane came down. Each MiG cost an average \$20 million or more, contrasted with \$60,000 or \$70,000 for each Stinger. That was the kind of Cold War return on an American dollar that the CIA loved. But the Stinger's real impact was the way the Soviets had to evade attack. The Hinds flew higher and higher and were of little value. The Soviet ground troops began referring to the pilots as 'cosmonauts'. P438

Vickers's resignation

Mike Vickers had decided he had set up the right weapons mix, done his work, and resigned the CIA. He knew he could never get promotion quickly, and without people such as Gust Avrakotos, never work on such extraordinary projects again. Despite his lowly grade, he was calling the shots on 57 percent of the Directorate of Operations total budget. He left to join Wharton Business School and do an MBA.

Other resignations

Gust's champion John McMahon had already resigned. Ed Juchniewicz was also stepping down. And something seemed to be wrong with Bill Casey. There were rumours about his health and he was in fact dying of a brain tumor. Gust's power base was changing, and he couldn't influence promotions for Vickers. Charlie Wilson sought Gust out to celebrate the success of the mujahideen's use of the Stinger. The only problem was, Avrakotos was no longer there.

Chapter Thirty: The Brown Bomber

Avrakotos in purgatory

From the moment the Stingers brought down their first kills, others at the CIA would ride to victory on the tiger Gust had unleashed. Avrakotos was in purgatory, 'in Africa'. He never told Wilson about his growing troubles with Clair George and the system. His mistake was to become embroiled in trying to stop what everyone would come to call the Iran-Contra affair. Gust was still in charge of Iran then, so he was one of the first to be told of the White House's idea that it was time to try to cut a deal with

Khomeini's Iran. Part of what triggered his distress was the proposal to sell arms to Iran was being pushed by the kind of zealots, including Oliver North, who had dreamed up the Vlasov's army madness.

Iran-Contra

In the beginning the Agency was only indirectly involved. The Israelis were pushing the scheme. They had convinced Bud McFarlane and North that there were moderates in Iran who could be dealt with. At that point Iran was losing its war with Iraq, and the Israelis seemed to believe that if the president allowed them to sell some of their US-supplied Hawk missiles, it would not only lead to the release of the hostages but to the beginning of a new strategic alliance that would prevent the Soviets from getting a foothold in Iran. P441

Losing a battle with Clair George

Avrakotos's thinking was not terribly complicated. He could not figure out any reason why he or the CIA should be engaged in efforts that Oliver North and the NSC staff were trying to push. The stated policy of the US was not to bargain with terrorists. Specifically, it was not to arm Iran, which was responsible for backing the men holding the US hostages in Beirut. And besides, there was no rational justification for believing that the scheme being pushed would work. So Gust mobilised to put a stop to it. He drafted a memo explaining why the Agency should not get involved.

Re-assignment to Africa

Clair George, Gust's boss, was reluctant to say no to the White House's plan. He was a contender for promotion, and was also a complex man. He warned Gust that he would not agree with the memo, and arranged for Gust to be taken out of the Iran loop. His friends inside the Iran operation kept Gust informed, but he knew that something was going to blow. His three-year tour was up at this time, and his friend Bert Dunn brought Gust the bad news. 'Clair George wants you to go to Africa'. Dunn tried to make the new job, number three man in the African Division, sound exciting, but they both knew.

Kept away from Charlie Wilson

The second blow was that he was ordered to break off all contacts with Charlie Wilson. Avrakotos now knew that George was running an operation, and by tying Gust's hands with the very influential Charlie Wilson, Clair George knew that Wilson would continue to see the Agency in a good light. Gust couldn't complain to Charlie if he was not allowed to talk. He took his successor, Jack Devine to meet Charlie, then announced he was bowing out.

The farewell party

Close to five hundred people turned out to farewell Gust Avrakotos, and during the very drunken party, he was given a special award. The CIA's blacks had an award they gave each year to one of their own who had distinguished him-or herself. It was called the Brown Bomber award, and it had never gone to a white guy. Thea was the spokesperson: 'We want to give this award to the blackest motherfucker of us all.' This is the only formal citation from the CIA that Gust Avrakotos ever got. P454

Chapter Thirty One: 'It's My War, Goddamn It'

Embarrassment for Charlie

Charlie and Sweetums had had a particularly satisfying tour to his usual haunts. He flew into Peshawar to give his usual blood donation to the Red Cross hospital, and met the mujahideen commanders who had gathered to see him. At the end of the day the plane, the Defense Intelligence Agency's plane attached to the US embassy in Islamabad, was scheduled to fly him and Sweetums to Lahore for an official dinner being held in his honour.

Alas, one of the embassy's military attachés took it upon himself to scrutinise the rules and discovered that civilians, other than wives or relatives of congressmen were not cleared to fly on his military spy plane. He ordered the pilots to ban Sweetums from the flight. One of Wilson's escorts tried to warn the colonel that he was making a mistake. But it was too late. This colonel was trying to say that his precious \$200,000 plane was too good for Sweetums and that she would have to wait a day in Peshawar until the next scheduled flight. Wilson says it was the first time in twenty years that he lost his temper: 'I just went bug-fuck,' screaming at the helpless US ambassador and then calling for a personal favour from Zia. Zia assured his friend that his personal plane was on its way to rescue Sweetums. And both

planes ended up flying parallel to each other to Islamabad. Wilson was hell bent on revenge. He went back to his Defense Appropriations subcommittee and bleated is complaint. P457

Appropriations revenge

Everyone on Appropriations understood that this was a petty, if not reckless, act of revenge that Wilson was calling for. But they also knew that it was something they had to do for their colleague. It was a professional courtesy, in effect. And lurking behind their vote to support their colleague was the recognition that it was not healthy to allow a lowly colonel to insult a member of Defense Appropriations. The whole sorry story ended up on the front page of the *New York Times*, adding to the legend of the erratic Charlie Wilson.

- By order of Congress, the offending DIA plane, along with another for good measure, was permanently removed from the military spy agency's fleet
- The two planes were then re-assigned to duty with the Texas Air National Guard

Charlie's next embarrassment

Charlie would learn that Zia would not be so obliging next time. On his next junket – a month-long trip with Sweetums starting in Rome, then Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, China and ending with a week in Tahiti. Things went wrong in Pakistan again. He wanted Sweetums to come over the border into Afghanistan and witness his deity as the great god of the Afghanistan war. He also brought along a Texan reporter to chronicle his trip into the war zone.

Into the war zone

Over dinner the night before in Islamabad, Charlie had told Zia of his plans. Zia kept a poker face during the dinner, but immediately ordered his intelligence chief, General Akhtar, to stop Wilson. They couldn't afford to lose this man, he was too important to Pakistan. P461

Thwarted

General Akhtar ordered Brigadier Yousaf to assemble the ISI, locate where Charlie and Sweetums were going to cross, monitor the party. Just before they passed over the border a jeep screamed up to them and warned them there was heavy shelling ahead and turned them back. Later Wilson realised who had set this up and was beside himself with rage. He got General Akhtar on the phone and lit into the intelligence chief: 'It's my war, goddamn it. I'm paying for it, and I'm damn well going to see it.' P462

Zia relents

After much agonising, Zia relented, but Wilson could only enter Afghanistan on his terms. Charlie was mollified and they agreed, on his next trip, Charlie and Sweetums could go in. The happy couple flew off to their exotic section of the junket: Hong Kong and Tahiti. It didn't have the romantic allure Charlie intended as Sweetums spent too much time in the sun on the first day and had to go to hospital with sun stroke. They returned to Washington with news that the entire Afghan programme had been placed in jeopardy.

Iran-Contra dodgy bank accounts

A news story article claimed that the CIA had co-mingled proceeds from the Iranian arms deal with Afghan funds in a secret Swiss bank account. Reporters were asking the obvious questions: had the CIA diverted Afghan funds to the Contras? Charlie was beside himself. He was placated by Gust's successor, Tom Twetten, who explained that no funds had been diverted. There had only been an overnight parking of the money. So Wilson moved quickly to control the damage. He called for a press conference

The press conference

Not since the cocaine scandal had so many reporters crowded into Wilson's office. He blandly explained the drama and they realised there was no scandal. They left empty-handed. He was furious that the CIA had even risked his programme, but he could get no real explanation from an increasingly confusing director Bill Casey.

Distraction campaign

There was a silver lining to the Iran-Contra disaster. Rarely can the government and the press handle more than one great scandal at a time. The Contra war had always been a heaven-sent distraction, and once again congressional staffers, reporters and politicians were climbing all over the supposedly covert

Nicaraguan operation. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan it was a completely free ride and Charlie was alerted that his trip into the war zone was ready. P467

Chapter Thirty Two: A Jihad to Remember

Charlie's trip to the war

Brigadier Yousaf had the thankless task of organising the trip. It was the beginning of Charlie's bright shining moment. He was only in Afghanistan four days, but he did it all. He actually rode a white horse. He wore the armour of these Muslim knights – a Chitrali hat, *shalwar kameezes*. An elite guard of the Pakistan special forces, dressed as mujahideen, had been sent along to watch over him. Two Stinger teams kept him in sight at all times. Charlie figured that not even Genghis Khan had ever had such bodyguards. P471

Rite of passage

For Charlie Wilson the trip had been his rite of passage: 'I felt I had entered the ranks of the initiated,' he recalls. 'I had dinner right afterward at Army House with Zia and Akhtar. Zia got all carried away about how he wanted to get in there and fight them himself. He was particularly jealous when I told him the muj had let me fire some of the volleys. I was most grateful to Zia and Akhtar for letting me do this. It had been far more than I had expected.' P475

CIA reaction

Milt Bearden's CIA station chief in Pakistan was furious. He told the congressman that what he had done was unconscionable. He had placed the entire programme in jeopardy, and everyone was very upset. Having made this statement for the record, the exuberant station chief then laughed loudly and demanded that Wilson tell him everything. He then presented to him the first spent gripstock from the Stinger that Engineer Ghaffar had used to bring down the first Hind. It was mounted on a dark mahogany frame. Charlie had it sent back home and hung it over the door to his office. P475

The Democrats' reaction

The Democrats, meanwhile, had been reduced by Ronald Reagan to a party of whining naysayers. With Afghanistan, Charlie was giving them something they could claim credit for. This was the good war. It was also Congress's war. And, mainly, it belonged to the House.

Mujahideen victories

Even though no one was yet predicting, the CIA's battlefield reports were amazing. The tide was turning. In Geneva, the State Department had begun claiming that the Russians seemed genuinely interested in negotiating a way out. And then the law of the unexpected struck. In July, just after Congress had passed legislation authorising new aid to Pakistan, a man widely believed to be Zia's agent, Arshad Pervez, was caught in Philadelphia trying to buy twenty-five tons of a special steel alloy vital to the building of a nuclear bomb. P477

Threatening to cut off Zia's aid

Steve Solarz, the powerful chairman of the South Asia subcommittee had earlier in 1985 tried to cut off Zia's funding over fears he was trying to build a nuclear bomb. This time there was a Solarz amendment on the books that would force the White House to stop all aid to Zia over this affair. There was no realistic way to avoid it: Congress was going to cut Zia off, and Solarz was the first to alert Wilson to this likelihood when he informed him on the floor of the House about what his Pakistani friends had done now. 'I believe Steve told me about Pervez with some glee,' recalls Charlie. P478

Charlie's greatest achievement in Congress

Everything Charlie had previously accomplished had been carried out in the shadows and behind closed doors. Here he had to operate publicly against a coalition of virtuous liberals. On the face of it, this was a lost cause. US policy was firmly committed to nuclear non-proliferation. And even if Regan claimed a national security waiver, Congress was now committed to enforcing its own law.

But Wilson would end up forcing his colleagues to abandon their pretence of ethical deliberation. He would strip Congress down to a body that operates solely on the basis of power and horse trading. He would call in every chit, and, to the horror of his liberal friends, win.

- Steve Solarz was confronted with the worse case scenario: the Afghan resistance collapses, the Soviets triumph, the present government in Pakistan disappears, an anti-American government in Pakistan replaces it; and it will have possession of the bomb
- Charlie warned Zia of the problem; he hired lobbyist Denis Neill to get to work
- Charlie then cajoled seven key members and their wives to spend Thanksgiving in Pakistan and meet Zia and be converted to the mujahideen cause
- Zia threw an official state dinner for the delegation; Charlie gave Zia a rousing speech and Zia replied, speaking movingly of the American-Pakistan alliance
- Back in Washington, with Denis Neill, they called everyone in the congressional directory who had favours from Charlie. 'This is payback time,' he would say. He was calling in his debts
- 'Are you with me or with Solarz?' he would put to each of his colleagues. Everyone knew that Charlie would remember forever which side they chose
- The battle culminated at the Joint House-Senate conference and Charlie organised for the Pakistan issue to be last on the agenda when everyone was tired and wanted to go home
- He nobbled the chairman, David Obey, by reminding him of Charlie's role in ensuring Democrat consensus-building in the discipline and control of the subcommittee
- By 3:00am Charlie had managed to get a large portion of the administration's original funds restored to Pakistan
- The two chairmen – Obey and Inouye – knew that Charlie would threaten to take the issue to the floor if he didn't get his way. And on the floor Charlie had the votes to win
- For Obey and Inouye there was no greater nightmare than to fail to report out a complete bill. Anarchy would break out if the two chambers began voting on each individual item
- Time after time, Charlie was asked 'Will you accept a compromise?' and each time he claimed, 'No, I can't live with that.'
- At 5:00am Wilson won

January 1988

It was at this time that Eduard Shevardnadze drew his unexpected intimate, George Schulz, aside at Geneva to tell him secretly that the Kremlin had reached a decision to withdraw. Barring the unforeseen, Charlie Wilson's war was about to end. P484

Chapter Thirty Three: The Price of Glory

Soviet casualties

By early 1986 everyone, everywhere in the Soviet Union, knew something of the horror of Afghanistan. Charlie's money had kicked in and Vickers's programme was coming on line. The mujahideen were suddenly on the march – everywhere they were taking the offensive, ambushing convoys, assassinating Russian soldiers, setting off bicycle bombs and camel bombs and car bombs, shelling the Soviet embassy, shooting down helicopters and planes. The mujahideen were dying too, in far, far greater numbers than the Soviets and their Afghan allies... But Gorbachev and his inner circle could see things getting worse. After the Varennikov offensive, they were faced with disturbing signs that the resistance, instead of being crushed, was showing new signs of vitality and lethal ability. P488

Varennikov's other mission

In April 1986, as the new fighting season re-opened, General Varennikov was suddenly pulled out of Kabul for an urgent mission of the highest national priority: the biggest nuclear accident in history had spread from the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl, poisoning thousands of square miles.

Ojhiri explosion

Zia had stalled the UN talks in Geneva to give the CIA an extra month to rush in supplies. Once the accord was signed, both superpowers would be prohibited from any further arms shipments. His reason for doing so was the earlier disaster in Islamabad when the mujahideen's secret stash of ten thousand tons of ordnance, haphazardly stored at the Ojhiri military camp, blew up. Thirty thousand rockets, millions of rounds of ammunition, vast numbers of mines, Stingers, Blowpipes, anti-tank missiles, rocket launchers and mortars were destroyed. And over a hundred people died and more than a thousand were wounded. Zia immediately got on the phone to Charlie Wilson and asked for help. Within twenty-four hours, huge US cargo planes were unloading weapons to take to the front line. P492

Peace

On April 14, 1988, the signing of the Geneva accords was announced on Moscow television with little fanfare. Unlike the silence and mystery that had surrounded the Red Army's invasion nine years earlier, this was the silence of humiliation. From Islamabad, Zia called the negotiated withdrawal 'a miracle of the twentieth century.' P493

Charlie's request to the CIA

That was when Charlie went to the CIA to ask for his first personal favour – he wanted to take a *60 Minutes* crew into Afghanistan. Bill Casey had recently died of a brain tumor. His successor, Judge William Webster, had inherited Wilson without any of the controversy that accompanied his entry into the secret agency. He later became head of the Oversight subcommittee, in charge of ferreting out intelligence abuses and he immediately called his Langley friends to celebrate. 'Well, gentlemen, the fox is in the henhouse. Do whatever you like.' P494

Request granted

No one at the CIA thought this was a good idea. State and AID were horrified, and Sweetums insisted that Charlie would be skewered. The Pakistanis, with their aversion to such publicity, had absolutely no interest. But Zia, like everyone else at this stage, could not say no to the man who had made everything possible. P494

Back into Afghanistan

Peter Henning, veteran cameraman for *60 Minutes* accompanied Charlie inside the war zone and was amazed by the way the mujahideen treated the congressman – almost as if he were one of their field marshals. When Wilson fired a 14.5mm at a mountain target and the mujahideen started cheering, the cameraman was struck with a sense of déjà vu. When the congressman mounted a white horse, it finally came to him: Lawrence of Arabia. From that moment on, Henning couldn't shake the peculiar feeling that somehow he was filming on a Hollywood set.

He wasn't far wrong. The whole visit had been carefully choreographed by CIA man Milt Bearden. CIA didn't have the right to be there, but it was as if they were tipping their hat to Charlie. The State Department, the embassy in Islamabad, the Pakistani army and intelligence services – all were breaking the rules and doing whatever was necessary to try to acknowledge their debt to this curious rogue congressman. The idea was to help Charlie take credit for the biggest and most successful CIA operation ever – for what might well be considered that last true campaign of the Cold War. P497

Chapter Thirty Four: 'Here's to You, You Motherfucker'

Zia's crash

On August 17, 1988, Charlie Wilson was at his desk early when he received a call: 'President Zia's plane has gone down with Akhtar and the general, and we're acting on the premise that it's true.' The US ambassador, Arnie Raphel, had also been on board, along with the American military attaché and nine of Zia's military high command. All were presumed dead. P503

State funeral

Losing Zia crushed Charlie. At the state funeral in Islamabad, with a million Pakistanis and mujahideen crowding up to him, Charlie made his way to Akhtar's successor, Hamid Gul, and broke into tears. 'I have lost my father on this day,' he said. Charlie had no children, and his parents were gone. His entire emotional life had become involved with the war. When he returned to Washington, the enormity of the catastrophe overcame him. He told Charlie Schnabel that he couldn't deal with the Afghans or even the Pakistanis any more. Schnabel must take over the account. He did, and became alarmed for his boss who was drinking again, and not taking part in any committees.

Foreboding - weapons

The clans started to tear each other up even before the Russians had gone. A foreboding crept into the minds of the more observant American officials as they thought of the hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of weapons stored in mountain caves throughout Afghanistan.

Foreboding – religion

Even Charlie Schnabel, who had become so enraptured with the guerrillas that he had converted to Islam one emotional night, had warned Wilson years before that the warriors of God, whom he had grown to admire and trust, themselves feared such true fanatics and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the special favourite of the ISI and the CIA. P503

Last Russian to leave Afghanistan

On February 15, 1989, Boris Gromov, commander of the once-proud 40th Army, strode across the Friendship Bridge in front of a worldwide television audience, the last Russian to leave Afghanistan. From the station in Islamabad Bearden sent a simple cable: 'We won.' Charlie dashed off his own note to Gust: 'We did it.'

Celebrations

Gust was in Rome that day when Charlie was drinking himself to sleep after the CIA office party thrown by Judge Webster ('the most raucous and overt celebration they've ever had there') and Boris Gromov was marching home. Avrakotos was now retired and longed to give Charlie a call. But he figured that Wilson would be out celebrating with all of Avrakotos's old Agency crowd. He couldn't stand pity, and he didn't want to feel like an outsider. So he kept to himself in Rome.

The next day in Washington Charlie watched the events again on the television and moved quickly to the refrigerator where he always kept a bottle of Dom Pérignon for special occasions. Positioning himself on the terrace before the TV image of the retreating Red Army and the city he loved, the tall man raised his glass to Boris Gromov: 'Here's to you, you motherfucker.' P506

Epilogue – Unintended Consequences

September 11, 2001

Charlie Wilson was alerted to the disaster at the World Trade Center by a friend who told him to turn on the television. As he watched it, a sickening realisation gripped him: it had to be the work of terrorists, and, if so, he had little doubt that the killers were Muslims.

By now Charlie had retired from Congress and was working as a lobbyist, with Pakistan as one of his main accounts... When the photographs of the nineteen hijackers appeared in the newspapers across the country, he took some comfort in pointing out that they were all Arabs, not Afghans. 'It didn't register with me for a week or two that this thing was all based in my mountains.' P508

Consequences of the Afghan war

The scope and nature of this covert campaign has still not registered in the consciousness of most Americans. Nor is it understood that such secret undertakings inevitably have unforeseen and unintended consequences, which in this case remained largely ignored. None of the sponsors of the campaign, least of all Charlie Wilson, has ever felt responsible for the path the CIA-sponsored jihad has taken. P409

Origins of the book

George Crile produced a *60 Minutes* profile of Charlie Wilson when he joined him on a fact-finding mission to the Middle East in January 1989. It was in Kuwait that Gust Avrakotos and Charlie Wilson were reunited for the first time in several years and Crile was there to learn more.

Wedding plans for Charlie Wilson

Meanwhile, Charlie proposed to Sweetums and decided they must have the reception high up in the parade grounds of the Khyber Rifles. It was to be an event that would have impressed even Cecil B DeMille. All the plans were going well; his best man was to be the Egyptian defense minister Abu Ghazala; he would bring most of the Appropriations subcommittee and their wives, members of the CIA, and invited the *60 Minutes* crew along to film it all.

It might all have happened if Charlie hadn't gotten careless a couple of weeks later. He had flown to California to serve as the grand marshal in the annual Mule Day parade, an honour recognizing all that Charlie had done to enlist Tennessee mules in the great anti-Communist jihad. But early that morning, when Sweetums called Charlie's hotel room, Snowflake answered the phone. The wedding was off.

Continued support for the mujahideen

The Saudis and the CIA weren't prepared to have Charlie Wilson back down from his work in supporting the mujahideen. 'I decided to go along with it.' Charlie recalls. 'I didn't have the old fire and zeal, but I knew I had to pay back.' P514

In the second year after the Soviet withdrawal, Wilson delivered another \$250 million for the CIA to keep its Afghan programme intact. With Saudi matching funds, the mujahideen would receive another half billion dollars to wage war. The expectation was that they would join forces for a final push to throw out the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime, restore order, and begin the process of rebuilding.

It didn't happen. Instead the Najibullah forces held, as the Afghans bickered and disgraced themselves by massacring prisoners. That year, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait; adding insult to injury, Gulbuddin and Sayaf – the mujahideen leader closest to the Saudis, whose men had guided Wilson into Afghanistan for the *60 Minutes* shoot – both publicly sided with Hussein against the United States. Their subsidies, however, continued. P515

Bob Oakley

Bob Oakley became ambassador in Pakistan, taking over his current post when his predecessor Arnie Raphel, died in the plane crash with Zia. Oakley was a hard-liner when the Russians were the Evil Empire. But as he assessed the US presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he drew the conclusion that America's national interests were not being served. His recommendation was to cut off the mujahideen, and he began moving about in key political circles in Pakistan, telling the ISI and the mujahideen leaders that the US was getting out. The United States had done its part and each year it seemed that Najibullah only grew stronger and the mujahideen only more divided, less attractive, maybe, even dangerous. Oakley's fear was that they might win and we'd have to cope with the spectacle of our freedom fighters running riot – all in the name of a CIA freedom campaign. P518

Charlie's last push

But no one could just turn off Charlie Wilson's war like that. With no requests for funds, the Senate Select Committee met and reported out a bill with nothing in it for Afghanistan. One September 30, 1991, the end of the fiscal year, the flow of weapons, ammunition, and supplies that the mujahideen had so dearly loved, would stop. But for Charlie Wilson, there was something fundamentally wrong with his war ending then and there. He didn't like the idea of the US going out with a whimper. The president might want to end the war, but it wasn't his war to end. It had always been Congress's war and just because there was disarray at the CIA it didn't mean Congress should step back. In the end, Charlie got the committee to agree to continue to supply the mujahideen - \$50 million a quarter. With the Saudi contribution, that meant another \$400 million for the mujahideen.

1992 – a banner year

As the mujahideen were poised for their thirteenth year of war, instead of being cut off, it turned out to be a banner year. Along with the money they found themselves with a cornucopia of new weaponry sources that opened up when the US decided to send the Iraqi weapons captured during the Gulf War to the mujahideen... In April 1992 they managed to stop fighting one another long enough to take Kabul. Once again Charlie felt vindicated. He had stayed the course and allowed the victory that belonged to the Afghans to occur. But then everything became ugly as factions fought one another for the prize.

Warnings

Inevitably, great events have unintended consequences. What no one involved anticipated was that it might be dangerous to awaken the dormant dreams and visions of Islam. Which is, of course, exactly what happened.

[And there follows a very poorly researched history lesson on why the Islamists hate the Americans. No mention of fundamentalists rather than just Islamic people, and too clichéd to write down. It's a shame he didn't have the depth to actually report on the consequences of the secret war. It leaves a bad ending to an otherwise very interesting read.]

The End