

## *Brief: CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR*

The **SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR** (1979 – 1989) was a nine-year conflict involving Soviet Union forces supporting the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan government against the mujahideen resistance. The latter group found support from a variety of sources including the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other Muslim nations in the context of the Cold War. The billions of dollars in aid funneled to the mujahideen through the efforts of Charlie Wilson made it possible for the Afghans to defeat the Soviet forces. An accounting of this last battle of the Cold War is key to understanding two of the most important events of our time – the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of militant Islam.

Texas Congressman **CHARLIE WILSON**, known as “Good Time Charlie” to his friends and detractors, served in the Texas House (1961–1967) and Senate (1967-73) before moving to the U. S. House of Representatives. He served the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District until 1996 when he retired.

Wilson's successful efforts to provide over \$3 billion of funding to the Afghan rebels were revealed in the book *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History* (2003), by George Crile III. In the 2007 film version of the book, actor Tom Hanks portrayed Wilson. Wilson was also a key character in *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (2005), by Steve Coll. On December 27, 2007, the History Channel broadcast *The True Story of Charlie Wilson*, a two-hour documentary about the congressman's Afghan war efforts and his personal life.

Our speaker, **CHARLIE SCHNABEL**, served as Congressman Charlie Wilson's chief of staff during the Soviet-Afghan War. He received a B.A. in Bacteriology and an M.A. in Public Administration from the University of Texas at Austin. After serving in the Texas Senate as Reading Clerk to the House for three years, Charlie was asked by then Lt. Governor Ben Ramsey to serve as Secretary of the Senate. What was supposed to be a temporary post became a 23-year career. Charlie served under Lt. Governors Ramsey, Preston Smith, Ben Barnes and Bill Hobby.

After his career in the Senate, Schnabel worked for seven years as the Executive Assistant Commissioner of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission. In 1985, he received a phone call from Congressman Wilson offering him a job as his chief of staff. After several refusals, he finally accepted – not knowing that within a year he would be in the middle of covert operations in Afghanistan. Schnabel made many trips to the war zone along the Afghan-Pakistan border to fight with the mujahideen.

In Chapter 25 of Crile's book, you can learn about Schnabel's part in what is now known as Charlie Wilson's War.