If that’s where it all had ended for Charlie Wilson—standing tall at the CIA’s Langley headquarters that day with the fear of nuclear war fast receding and America now the world’s only superpower—then it truly would have been a Cold War fairy tale come true. (Crile, 2003)

Although the war was won, Wilson’s actions in Afghanistan were no less destabilizing. Wilson had always assured his colleagues that Afghanistan was the one morally unambiguous cause that the United States had supported since World War II. But after the departure of the Soviets, that claim had become a falsehood. By 1990, the Afghan fighters had suddenly re-emerged as what they were before the war: feuding warlords obsessed with gaining territory and settling generations-old scores. The difference between this period and the period before the war began was that now the fighters were armed with hundreds of millions of dollars of weapons and explosives. Afghanistan had become a gathering place for radical Islamists (all the while Wilson kept the funding spigot open until several months after the Soviet Union collapsed). Veterans of the Afghan campaign now suspected America to seek world domination and control the oil of the Muslims.

Wilson visited Moscow to try to end the surrogate war and rebuild Afghanistan. To his relief, the soon to be Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Kozyrev told Wilson that the United States and Russia had a common interest in stabilizing Afghanistan and preventing radical Islamic elements from taking power (a dormant movement triggered by the war and the mujahideen’s victories). Moreover, the Soviets had their own preoccupation: a mujahideen leader named Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Kozyrev assured him that Gulbuddin’s brand of militant Islam was as dangerous to America as it was to the Soviet Union.

While the negotiations took place, the Afghans continued to bicker and disgrace themselves by massacring prisoners. They could not defeat the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime. Thus, rebuilding could not begin.

**Good News or the Bad News?**

A turning point of the war came on April 1, 1991, when the freedom fighters “liberated” their first major Afghan city: Khost. In response, Wilson’s assistant Charlie Schnabel visited the mujahideen to take note of how the mujahideen were conducting themselves as they began to reclaim their country. He was shocked by the stories he heard from the Pakistani locals. The mujahideen were hijacking U.S. aid trucks and looting stores. They had burned a healthcare facility to the ground because they were convinced it was promoting free sex for women. Female Afghan teachers and nurses were being threatened with violence almost every day. Moreover, the inhabitants of the newly liberated Khost consisted only of mujahideen soldiers, many of whom were radical Arabs who had come to join the jihad. The original inhabitants of Khost had all fled the liberators.

The mujahideen freedom fighters were a disgrace to the Western policies that Wilson had hoped they would emulate, and there was a mounting concern about the Afghan mujahedeen, especially their tendencies toward brutality, heroin trafficking and fundamentalist religious practices. According to a Soviet prisoner, “one [prisoner] had been fucked so many times he didn’t know what was going on.” (Parry)

It is important to note that it was amid the anarchy of Afghanistan that the Taliban was established. Locals turned to a mullah named Mohammed Omar and his religious students responded to calls from victims of lawlessness. Thus, the ranks of the Taliban grew with society’s desperate desire for order. (Tanner)

**Inertia, not Momentum**

With the end of the Cold War in 1991, the only reason why the CIA and KGB were continuing to fund this war of the tribes was inertia. In other words, neither side wanted to be the first to pull back.

Many, such as Robert B. Oakley, then the Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, began to wonder if the U.S.-backed Afghans, no longer menaced by the Red Army, were any different from the Afghans whom the Russians were backing. In fact, it was the leaders of the Afghan puppet government who were saying the right things.

The mujahideen, on the other hand, were committing unspeakable atrocities and couldn’t even put aside their bickering and murderous thoughts long enough to capture Kabul...Without the Russians around, did we really want to be giving long-range Stingers, satellite-guided mortars, burst transmitters, and hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of ordnance to these men? (Crile, 2003)

**Blowback**

[ [img](http://media.nj.com/ledgerupdates_impact/photo/2011/05/9539023-large.jpg) ]

[ caption ] “Great events have unintended consequences.” —Charlie Wilson, History Channel

What no one anticipated was that it might be dangerous to awaken the dormant visions of Islam. There were many warnings before Wilson’s award at Langley. In January 1993, a young Pakistani named Mir Aimal Kasi walked to the gates of the CIA and murdered two officers before escaping to Pakistani. He was embraced as a folk hero. One month later, the World Trade Center car park was bombed. There clearly existed the belief in veterans of the Afghan campaign that America was their enemy.

Instead of caring for his beloved mujahideen, Wilson came to almost ignore these issues. He began to drink more, refused to meet with the mujahideen when they came to Washington, and skipped special briefings that the CIA put on for him. He blindly continued to fund the fighters that were slowly becoming the United States’ new foe. (Crile, 2003)

“The presumption at Langley had been that when the United States packed its bags and cut off the Afghans, the jihad would simply burn itself out...Perhaps that policy would have worked out had it been only weapons that we left behind.” (Crile, 2003)

The more dangerous legacy of the Afghan war was in the minds of Muslims around the world.

“To them the miracle victory over the Soviets was all the work of Allah -- not the billions of dollars that America and Saudi Arabia poured into the battle, not the ten-year commitment of the CIA that turned an army of primitive tribesmen into **technoholy warriors**” (Crile, 2003)

[ video of the translator looking unsure ]

The consequence of Wilson’s waging a secret war and never advertising its role was the eruption of the spirit of jihad and the belief in surrogate soldiers that, having brought down one superpower, they could just as easily take on another. According to Major Jeremy Kotkin, an Army officer who specialized in Afghanistan and Pakistan, “because Wilson and the CIA could not even begin to conceive of the complexities and nuances of Afghan culture, power bases, and politics, he doomed his own effort to failure.”

Not only was America directly harmed, but Wilson’s gross incompetence in dealing with the aftermath also negatively affected Afghanistan. Following the war, no funding was provided to restructure. Due to this, Afghanistan fell to shambles. By the end of 1993, there were no roads and schools. A power vacuum formed, and the Taliban and Osama bin Laden easily gained power. Their sloppy solution to a new problem (sending 100 million in cruise missiles) did nothing but to strengthen the belief that Allah had protected their new leader.