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# Adventurer Devotes Energy to Anti-Communist Causes

By PAUL DEAN, *Times Staff Writer*

A March article in the Soviet newspaper Izvestia published its thoughts on aggressors and hypocrites and culprits . . . and condemned Jack Wheeler as an ideological gangster working under the auspices of the CIA.

Wheeler loves the first accusation. He is a little huffy about the second. But together, he said, it's a rave review. "When the Soviet



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Union calls me that, it means I'm starting to get under their skin. Ideological gangster? I'll proudly refer to myself as that. CIA auspices? Look, anybody who has incurred their (Soviet) displeasure is a plot of the CIA. They're very conspiracy minded. . . ."

So, it should be noted, is Wheeler. His mail goes to a Malibu box number while his gardener goes to a residence "somewhere in West Los Angeles." No sign on that home identifies it as headquarters of Wheeler's neophyte Freedom Research Foundation. Similar security (albeit more anti-crackpot than a barrier to the serious assassin) has been imposed on the date and destination of his next overseas trip.

That's because recent Wheeler dealings and wanderings have been to Afghanistan with the Mujahedeen freedom fighters . . . to Angola with Jonas Savimbi's UNITA guerrillas . . . to Cambodia and Nicaragua

and Mozambique and any other place where, he says, native and armed insurgents are opposing Soviet imperialism.

All of which, Wheeler agreed, justifies that editorial evaluation by Izvestia.

It also has proved the viability of a point, Wheeler added, and maybe the existence of a pattern.

For the Third World, Wheeler believes, is rejecting Soviet imperialism in these '80s as it rejected American imperialism in the '50s. Marxism and totalitarianism, he has testified to government groups, are being moved aside by revolutions (within nations populated by 120 million people) pushing for democracy and Western values. He sees the empire of Soviet Russia crumbling, maybe teetering to follow the fall of the British and French empires.

## Produced An Alliance

And in June, in the rebel stronghold of Jamba, Angola, Wheeler stood among the hunted (who also happen to be the hunters) of Laotian jungles and Afghan hills and saw one of his unusual ideas produce a bizarre solidarity—a *contra* conclave of anti-communist guerrilla leaders from Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Laos and Angola. It produced an alliance known as Democratic International.

"Now there's something starting up in South Yemen," Wheeler continued. "There's a clandestine radio operating there. Surinam may have something. But these are embryonic and nothing like the anti-Marxist movement in Angola with its 50,000 guerrillas . . . (or) the situation in Mozambique, twice as big as California, where guerrillas have free run of the countryside, the government is collapsing and there are no elections, no food.

"I've been to these countries. Three times in Nicaragua. Three times in Afghanistan. Twice in Angola. Once each in Mozambique and Cambodia. I've lived with the insur-

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gents, traveled with them, and I see the goals are the same, the argument and rhetoric similar and it is anti-imperialism.

"It is important to understand that Soviet Russia is the last great 19th-Century imperialist empire, but an ideological empire and a totalitarian one, not like the French and British empires. And like any imperialist empire, it must one day collapse. I have no idea of the rate of collapse, but on the edges at least, it is collapsing. . . ."

Wheeler, 42, could well be considered an unarmed (although he has hefted assorted automatic weaponry as self-protection while walking foreign fields) soldier of political fortune; a Lawrence of Los Angeles intent on keeping his juices flowing.

That is indeed part of him. Yet he also is a man who addressed sessions of the Congressional Task

*'We only get one crack at life. It lasts but the snap of a finger.'*

Force on Afghanistan in February as easily as he slipped across alien borders in Afghan clothing in March. Politically, he is "an advocate of individual liberty and sometimes that puts me on the left, sometimes on the right. I could be a pro-defense libertarian, but I just don't think in categories."

Then there's Wheeler the unabashed, uncomplicated American patriot functioning on compelling combinations of attributes; education and physical strength, mental discipline and personality, pushiness with balance . . . and an unquestionable, unquenchable sense of adventure.

Son of the late Jackson Wheeler, a Los Angeles TV personality, young Jack was the nation's youngest Eagle Scout at 12. He climbed the Matterhorn at 14. He swam the Hellespont and was living with Amazon headhunters at 17. Then he hunted man-eating tigers in Vietnam and discovered a cannibal tribe in New Guinea and rode an elephant across the Alps to retrace Hannibal's route and went sky diving on the North Pole and wrote an appropriate how-to book ("The Adventurer's Guide") about all of it.

#### Lives by Crede

It has been to satisfy his credo: "We only get one crack at life. It lasts but the snap of a finger. What a waste, what a shame, if you are lowered away, for all eternity, without once having your mortal soul purged with the emetic of high adventure."

Finally there's Wheeler the intellectual, anthropologist, author, bachelor and philosopher . . . a melange fully reflected throughout that home somewhere west of La Cienega.

A mailbox-red, 1952, Corvette-powered, 130-miles-per-hour Alford K2 is parked outside. The bookshelves belong to Thomas Paine, Aristotle, Victor Hugo, Jules Verne and Robert Louis Stevenson. The mantle is spread with trophies from the cerebral to the cranial—a framed doctorate in philosophy from USC (1976) above a glass case holding a shrunken head from Java.

Wheeler, tanned, safari-shirted and barefoot, says it's all working together now. His love of adven-

ture. His scholarship. "There are people," he explained, "who although they are scholars and intellectuals, reading about it is not enough. They have to see it, to experience it. I am one of these people."

Wheeler began his insurgency experience two years ago. There had been a discussion on the Afghanistan situation with a magazine writer. Angola was the topic when talking with a friend from the Rand Corp. Then Wheeler (who was state chairman of Youth for Reagan during the gubernatorial campaign of 1966) just happened to be on the telephone with old friend and White House speech writer Dana Rohrabacher and the topic was Nicaragua. . . .

"I was in my office looking at a map of the world I keep on the wall," Wheeler said. "All of a sudden the map looked different. I told my friend: 'I'm looking at one, two, three, four, five, maybe six Third World countries where there are anti-Soviet guerrilla wars.' He said: 'My God, Jackson, you're right.'

"It was like a Gestalt. I suddenly saw the world differently and that something very important was going on . . . the related parts of a geopolitical phenomenon rejecting Soviet imperialism."

The Third World wars, Wheeler agrees, were quite visible. Washington was and is funding some guerrilla groups. "There had been perusal of the pieces," he explained, "but nobody had attempted a systematic study of the entire phenomenon of anti-Soviet guerrilla warfare. Since I had a background of getting into remote places, since I have a background in professional philosophy, social and political, that made me a candidate."

He decided to visit. Funded by a grant from the Reason Foundation of Santa Barbara, a 7-year-old,

nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to free society concepts, he spent 5½ months researching *contras* of the Third World.

In subsequent articles published by Reason magazine, Wheeler described marching with Nicaraguan Democratic Force patrols for four weeks. In Afghanistan he told of skirting Soviet outposts and picking through valleys and villages devastated by Russian helicopter gunships. A year ago Wheeler was writing from Cambodia and the Khymer People's National Liberation Front; then to Laos among Hmong guerrillas; then into Burma where tribal rebels are resisting the offbeat Socialism of Gen. Ne Win.

#### Famine as Weapon

He reported his question-and-answer interview with Mozambique resistance leader Alfonso Jacama, was told of forced famine as a weapon of civil war and photographed a child without hands. The youngster, he said, was injured by a Russian booby trap disguised as a plastic toy.

Wheeler taped one interview with an insurgent he considers typical of the whole.

The man had worked to buy a bicycle but was told by local officials that he could not obtain something just for himself. It had to

be a group purchase for a collective of at least five persons.

The man, on tape said: "Why five people? I work for myself but they say: 'You buy for five people.' I don't like this communism here. Very impossible that one."

Wheeler, in person, said: "He's talking about freedom. It's not just that he wants a bicycle. It's that he cannot spend the money he has earned on something he wants. He understands the inseparability of political and economic freedom."

The trip, Wheeler continued, confirmed his theory that Soviet influence is crumbling throughout the Third World. "Why? One, because it doesn't work. Soviet Marxism is an economic failure wherever it is tried. Two, the (Marxist) people who fought for freedom in many of these countries only to get a dictatorship worse than the first one. And in Afghanistan, it was a stark effort to

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conquer an independent people.

"Through Latin America, Africa and Asia, there has been a marked shift away from socialism, dictatorships and sympathy towards the Soviet Union . . . and a shift towards the free market, towards democracy and a greater regard for Western values.

"Then you start to look at the situation in Eastern Europe. There are no armed insurgents, obviously, but Solidarity is alive and well and their (Soviet) entire hold is eroding."

Wheeler's tour produced a series of articles for Reason magazine and opinion pieces in the Wall Street Journal and Washington Times. He has addressed college campuses, the Humphrey Task Force on Afghanistan, the Cato Forum in Washington, the Committee for a Free Afghanistan, congressional subcommittees—and written letters to editors wherever an anti-*contra* editorial has appeared. A book, "Pebbles in the Sling," is in manuscript form.

"I have had congressmen, senators and people in the White House tell me that what I've said has revised their view of the world, that the Russian juggernaut is running out of steam and that our (American) ideals are inspiring people throughout the Third World," Wheeler said.

Eighteen months ago he founded the Freedom Research Foundation, a two-person group (Wheeler and Laurie Biedermann, a research assistant with the National Security Division of Rand Corp.) operating as study center of worldwide, anti-communist insurgencies. Funding is by private donation with a current annual operating budget of \$50,000.

As its director, Wheeler developed the idea of a multinational alliance of freedom fighters. He says he took the thought to Lew Lehrman of New York, drugstore heir, GOP conservative leader and a power with Citizens for America, a private group that promotes policies of the Reagan Administration. It materialized as the June meeting in the Angolan bush.

"All my life I've had this dream to do a great damage to the Soviet Union," Wheeler said. "To anyone who believes in dignity and freedom, the Soviet Union is a great, evil institution. I have a chance to contribute to its destruction and I'm going to take it."

Is the CIA assisting his dreaming?

"The CIA knows well how I think they're screwing up in Afghanistan, how they Vietnamized the situation in Nicaragua with 103 men (CIA military advisers) in the field trying to run the *contras* to the point where every military decision becomes a political decision," Wheeler said. "As far as the agency is concerned, it has no business running covert operations. We need an intelligence gathering agency, but covert and paramilitary operations should be run by the Defense Department."

Wheeler wants to build his dream into a snowball.

"By the time the Kremlin tries to stop it, the snowball will be too big and there will be too many people involved. . . ."

He does not doubt his effectiveness.

"Enough is happening. That (Angola) meeting took place and my idea happened. Sure I'm having an effect. Don't forget, I'm an ideological gangster. . . ."