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## Institute of Current World Affairs

The Crane-Rogers Foundation  
4545 42nd Street NW, Suite 311  
Washington, DC 20016

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PAKISTAN

*Nicholas Schmidle is a Phillips Talbot Fellow of the Institute studying identity and politics in Pakistan.*

## Stand-Off:

### *Abdul Rashid Ghazi's Last Days*

By Nicholas Schmidle

JULY 2007

**ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 11**, just before dawn, one hundred of Pakistan's elite commandos breached the crumbling, bullet-scarred walls of Lal Masjid, or the "Red Mosque," on orders to find and kill Abdul Rashid Ghazi. The army's spokesman told the press that the fighting should be done within a few hours. He admitted that no one knew for sure how many Islamists had bunkered down inside the mosque with Ghazi, yet with thousands of regular army soldiers and Rangers supporting the commandos, three or four hours seemed a reasonable amount of time to kill or arrest everyone inside.

But the militants were a formidable force and at 11 a.m., the sound of gunfire was clattering across the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. The rebels inside the mosque had an arsenal. During the stand-off, they killed eleven commandos and paramilitary Rangers. When the operation finished, the army collected all the militants' weapons and stacked them neatly in a room for journalists to see. Molotov Cocktails filled empty cartons meant for Pepsi bottles. A suicide-bomber's vest lay on the floor. ("Don't get too near," said the weapons specialist talking to the journalists. "The jacket is still live.") There were machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG-7), and anti-tank mines.

Around 9 p.m. on night of the 11<sup>th</sup>, more than 12 hours after the army estimated the raid would be over, news channels reported Ghazi's death. Apparently, he took a shot in the leg, refused to surrender, and was then finally killed. The next morning, a full-page headline in *Dawn*, an English-language daily, read, "It's all over as Ghazi is killed." Ghazi was dead, his brother, Maulana Abdul Aziz, was arrested trying to escape in a burqa, and Lal Masjid lay in ruins. But their movement was far from defeated.

**WHEN I HEARD THAT GHAZI** died, I felt a little sad, to my surprise. Over the last year, I got to know him quite well. Every few weeks, I would visit him at Lal Masjid to chat about everything from jihad and the Islamic revolution he planned to lead to our preferred vacation spots and his favorite English authors. We rarely agreed about anything substantive (like his admiration for Osama Bin Laden), but we talked for hours at a time over tea, fruit, and an occasional belly laugh. I usually dropped by just before taking a trip out of Islamabad. He was always willing to share the phone numbers of his mullah friends in other Pakistani cities. Before I went to Bangladesh, Ghazi scribbled the name of a bearded politician on the back of his business card. The guy welcomed me to Dhaka like a brother; too bad that a few weeks later he was arrested for his links to terrorist groups. Still, having a personal reference from Abdul Rashid Ghazi was like having a backstage pass to the wild world of radical Islam.

Last December, I wrote a profile about Ghazi, "The Homebody," for my Institute newsletter. Confined to his mosque on a kind of unofficial house arrest — he was wanted on several serious charges and thought that the intelligence agencies would



*In an interview a month before his death, Abdul Rashid Ghazi explains why his “martyrdom” would only accelerate the Islamic revolution that he envisioned.*

kill him if he tried to step outside — Ghazi spoke openly of his connections to Islamic militants throughout the country. But since he was stuck in his mosque, I couldn't know for sure whether he was truly the mujahideen leader he made himself out to be, or simply a loudmouth craving attention. The first time I met Ghazi last May, I needed a reference from a former army officer-turned-jihadi named Khalid Khawaja. I met Khawaja at a café in Islamabad for lunch one day and asked that he make the introduction. He said that he would consult with Ghazi; if Ghazi agreed, then I could go. “But if I tell you that Ghazi is off limits,” Khawaja said, “then he is off-limits. Don't let me hear from someone else that you are still trying to meeting Ghazi. I told Daniel Pearl that Sheik Gilani was off-limits, but he tried to meet him anyway and you know what happened.” (Pearl was the *Wall Street Journal* reporter kidnapped and beheaded in Karachi in 2002 while reporting a story about the connections between Richard Reid, the so-called “shoe bomber,” and Sheik Gilani, a reclusive religious leader who some allege is a key node between Pakistan's intelligence services and the jihadi community.) Fortunately, Khawaja came back and said that Ghazi agreed to meet.

A year later, Ghazi had become the most desired interviewee in Pakistan. Though still confined to his mosque, he had become the strategist and brains behind a Taliban-inspired movement that was taking over Islamabad. To meet him, foreign- and local-TV crews braved the hard stares from dozens of Islamist vigilantes dispatched to guard the mosque, some clutching wooden staffs while others waved long-handled gardening tools. No formal references were necessary. He passed off secretarial duties to one of his students, who handled phone calls and his schedule. Whereas Ghazi once sat freely for two- or three-hours with me, I noticed him checking his watch after 45 minutes. He apologized. We are in the middle

of something big, he said.

**I WAS IN BANGLADESH,** watching Ghazi's friend get hauled away on terror charges, when a brigade of staff-wielding female madrasa students, or *Talibat*, took over a children's library adjacent to Lal Masjid and announced the establishment of a mini-, sharia-ruled state. It took place just a stone's throw from the parliament building. Thousands of jihadis descended on Islamabad to defend the mosque, taking up positions along the compound's pink walls and parapets, clutching wooden staffs, some with guns, most of their faces hidden by checkered scarves. Massive, homemade posters draped from the walls, praising jihad. Dozens of black flags, showing two crossed swords and inscribed

with Islam's profession of faith, *La illaha illa Allah* (“There is no God but God”), flew over the mosque and on lamp-posts at nearby intersections. When I asked Ghazi what the flags stood for, he smirked. “It is our own and not from anywhere in particular,” he said. “But some are saying it is like the Al Qaeda flag.”

Ghazi affectionately referred to the women as his “female commandos” and said the takeover of the library was a long time coming. President Pervez Musharraf's government “challenged the writ of Allah” by destroying a number of mosques in Islamabad; his girls responded by “challenging the writ of the state. Whose writ is greater?” he asked rhetorically.

Soon after the occupation of the children's library, Ghazi and his brother, Maulana Abdul Aziz, kicked off an anti-vice campaign in Islamabad. They started by kidnapping a brothel owner, dressing her in a black burqa, and forcing her to repent at a press conference. When a Western reporter asked Ghazi, who was always ready with a zinger quote, if his anti-vice activities signaled the “Talibanization” of Pakistan, he replied, “Rudy Giuliani, when he became mayor of New York, closed the brothels. Was that also Talibanization?” Meanwhile, President Pervez Musharraf's government stood by and did nothing. A few weeks later, plainclothes police officers drifted too close to the mosque, and the local “Taliban” kidnapped them as well. On April 6, after Friday prayers, worshippers from Lal Masjid blocked a road and lit a bonfire using a pile of un-Islamic CDs and DVDs as kindling. Musharraf's response? Still nothing. Musharraf reportedly wanted to launch an air strike on the mosque, but some of his top generals convinced him otherwise.

The establishment of a mini-Taliban state in Islamabad caught Musharraf at a bad time. Since early March,

lawyers in black suits had been leading frequent protests against Musharraf for his suspension of the chief justice of Pakistan on flimsy charges of nepotism. In Karachi on May 12, more than 40 people died when the chief justice arrived in the port city and gun battles broke out between pro- and anti-government political parties. In mid-March, the police stormed the offices of a private television channel in Islamabad for broadcasting footage of rioters clashing with police right outside the studio's windows. That afternoon, while I stood in front of the ransacked office, my eyes and nostrils stinging from the tear gas lingering in the air, a man approached me, shaking his head in disbelief. "In only a week, Musharraf has alienated two pillars of society — first the lawyers and now the media," he said. "What is he thinking?"

Meanwhile, the Taliban continued to make trouble in the border areas. On April 28, a suicide bomber reached within ten feet of the interior minister before blowing himself up, killing 28 people. (The minister escaped with light injuries.) Just two weeks later, another suicide bomber struck a restaurant in Peshawar, killing two dozen more. All the distractions left even the staunchest Musharraf supporters wondering if he had the ability — or the will — to keep Ghazi and his kind at bay.

**LAL MASJID HAD BEEN A HUB OF JIHADI** activity since the early 1980s, when scores of mujahideen passed through on their way to and from Afghanistan.

Around his twenty-second birthday, Ghazi made his first of many trips to Afghanistan, where he buddied-up with some of the jihadis who later signed Osama bin Laden's declaration of a "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." In 1998, bin Laden invited Ghazi and his father to Kandahar for a one-day meeting. Three months after they returned to Islamabad, the father was assassinated in the Lal Masjid courtyard. Ghazi blamed the Pakistani intelligence agencies. Bin Laden sent a condolence letter.

Ghazi and his brother took over after that. Aziz, a madrassa graduate, delivered the Friday sermons, while Ghazi handled the media and the administration of the mosque and its adjoining seminaries. Ghazi, the worldlier of the two, also played the strategist. His vision? "The ideal form of governance is Islamic governance and it was in Afghanistan under Mullah Omar," he explained. "I don't like democracy. Islam is not about counting people. In democracy, the weight of one vote is the same for a man who is taking drugs and doesn't care about his country as it is for the man with a vision for the future. The majority of people are ignorant people. This doesn't bring us a good system."

Although Ghazi's ideas about the supremacy of Sharia were shared by most of the leading ulema, or religious scholars, in Pakistan, many were uncomfortable with his methods. For instance, the MMA, a hard-line coalition of several religious parties that sits in the National Assembly



and governs two of Pakistan's four provinces, distanced itself from Lal Masjid's violent tactics. Similarly, the examination board responsible for most madrassas in Pakistan cancelled the registration of Ghazi's two seminaries. And Mufti Taqi Usmani, a scholar of immense repute who acted as pir, or spiritual guide, to Ghazi's brother, disowned his former disciple when the latter refused to order his students to vacate the children's library.

Ghazi didn't seem to care that the old guard was speaking against him. "Everywhere you look, you can see youngsters rejecting the old ones because old people do not like change," he said. "They are rigid."

In fact, Ghazi's power grab symbolized a significant shift in the leadership of madrassa-based politics. As resentment builds against Musharraf and the West, more Pakistani youth are running to embrace those with the most radical and revolutionary message. The majority of Ghazi's support came from Pashtuns, the ethnic group found in the Pakistani border areas and in southern Afghanistan. Of the 6,000 female students studying at his madrassas, more than 4,000 of them were from the North West Frontier Province. Two pro-Taliban mullahs from the lawless mountain region near the Afghan border voiced their approval. Both had made recent news lambasting female education and a campaign to vaccinate children for polio. They claimed the vaccine was an "impotency serum," part of an effort to wipe out Muslims.

Ghazi was not one to refuse support, but he insisted that his vision of an Islamic society was more sophisticated and tolerant than theirs. "We don't want to go backwards," he said. "Why would I give up my computer, my mobile phone, my walkie-talkie, my fax machine?" How can we be against female education while running the largest women's madrassa in the world, he asked. "Women are part of this movement." He shared an aphorism: "They say if you teach a man, you teach a person. But if you teach a female, you teach a whole family." I asked him about rumors in Islamabad that his students were stopping women at intersections and demanding that they stop driving. "My wife drives a car; she goes to the market and takes the children there and there and there," he said. "How is it possible that I will ask my students to stop other women driving?"

**GHAZI'S WIFE MIGHT HAVE GONE TO THE MARKET**, but Ghazi himself had been holed up inside Lal Masjid since August 2005, when the government charged him with inciting a riot and then failing to show up in court. (Ghazi and his brother were declared "absconders" and threatened with arrest.) The isolation took a certain toll. Each time I have visited Ghazi over the past year, his paunch grew bigger and bigger.

But while it may have contributed to Ghazi's weight gain, the Pakistani government had seemingly done little to stifle his political activism. In April, we walked down

a dirt alley tucked behind Lal Masjid's pink walls and stepped into an office equipped with three brand-new computers — the mosque's nerve center. Despite their stand-off with the government, the electricity was still working. A microphone stand, used by Ghazi's brother during his weekly radio addresses, craned in the corner. Beside one of the computers was a black tower featuring seven slots for the mass-production of propaganda CDs. Four young men, none of them older than 25 or 26, manned ringing phones while a printer spat out an op-ed to which Ghazi was making final edits.

I asked Ghazi how he imagined his Islamic revolution playing out. "Either the government does it or the people do it themselves. If the government does it, it will be peaceful. If the people have to do, it will be bloody," he said. A young bodyguard with a wispy beard and a Kalashnikov entered the room and whispered something into Ghazi's ear. He then relayed the message on his walkie-talkie. "We are demanding a peaceful revolution, but it depends on the government's attitude. Time and again they have threatened to launch a military operation on Lal Masjid. We are ready for this," he said. "We are armed." According to Ghazi, everyone is fed up with Musharraf, the army, and the entire existing system. "If we are killed, it will only give more momentum to our movement. The government knows this. And that's why they aren't coming."

**IN LATE JUNE, GHAZI OVERPLAYED** his hand. On June 23, just after midnight, a squad of Islamist vigilantes set out from Lal Masjid in the direction of a Chinese massage parlor across town. Ghazi claimed that the women inside were providing massages to men (a jihadi no-no) and performing other "un-Islamic activities." When his bearded, bamboo-staff-wielding shock troops arrived, they overpowered three security guards and took nine people hostage, including six Chinese women. That same day, the women were released wearing their new, Lal Masjid-supplied burqas.

But the Chinese government, which has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into building and upgrading the Pakistani port in Gwadar, Baluchistan, as well as the Karakorum Highway, wasn't willing to overlook the kidnapping so easily. In Beijing, a Chinese official told Pakistan's visiting minister of the interior, "We hope Pakistan will look into the terrorist attacks aiming at Chinese people ... and will severely punish the criminals." Beijing's ambassador to Islamabad told the press he was, "shocked and surprised at such an unlawful incident." One can assume that he used a much harsher tone in closed-door meetings, because within a few days of the masseuses' release, police and paramilitary units had encircled the mosque and pledged to crack down on the neo-Taliban.

On June 3, months of escalating tensions between Ghazi's self-described mujahideen and Musharraf's



security forces finally broke out into fierce street battles that left nine people dead. Just before noon, paramilitary Rangers were laying concertina wire at the end of the street facing Lal Masjid when militants inside the mosque fired on them. Rangers and police fired tear gas in response. Before long, the Taliban, wearing ammunition vests, holding Kalashnikovs, and sporting gasmasks, emerged from the mosque's Pepto-Bismol pink walls. Some took up positions behind sandbag bunkers, while others brazenly walked around in the streets.

Around 4:00 p.m., I headed in the direction of Lal Masjid to get a closer look. On the way, I passed a market that had locked its doors hours earlier, as the standoff began. People in the neighborhood were frantically pushing suitcases into their cars and hurrying to get out. I hadn't walked one-hundred yards when I saw the crowd turn and start sprinting my way, arms waving wildly. That's when I heard the clink and fizz of a metal teargas canister hitting the pavement and spraying its contents, at which point I also took off running, crying and coughing the whole way.

I finally turned into an alley, where a group of people had gathered around an old man lambasting the government. "The army is shooting the girls of Pakistan!" he said, in reference to three female madrassa students who were among those killed the first day. The crowd nodded. Though none of them wore beards or looked like typical Taliban supporters, their sympathies clearly lay with those in the mosque. Sadiq, a real estate agent from Islamabad, told me, "This is not a civilized approach to resolving a dispute. These people, after all, have small demands," he said, apparently less than aware of Ghazi's plan to overhaul Pakistan and turn it into Mullah Omar's Afghanistan. "In this world, there is no justice. Extremists have rights too, you know! Think about it. The army has all the latest weapons and chemicals and gases to use. The other side has nothing. Now the government has cut off their electricity and water supply. This is plain cruelty."

In previous visits to Lal Masjid, I saw a much more sophisticated cache of weapons than Sadiq gave them credit for. Besides an array of Kalashnikovs, Ghazi kept one specially equipped with a mini-grenade launcher (affixed to the AK-47 barrel). Moreover, most of the female students came from the North West Frontier Province or the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where locals always crave a good gun battle. When the government besieged Lal Masjid in January, the girls' brothers and fathers showed up to defend the mosque en masse, bringing their

own weapons. As for the male students, even Musharraf admitted that they are a dangerous bunch. Four days before the fighting began, he acknowledged that members of the banned jihadi organization, Jaish-e-Mohammad, were holed up inside, as well as plenty of eager suicide bombers. "I am not a coward," Musharraf said, addressing a media workshop, "But the issue is, tomorrow you will say 'What have you done?' There are women and children inside.'"

But on June 3, Musharraf decided that the need to crack down on Ghazi and his supporters outweighed the potential for negative headlines. His instinct that those in the mosque wouldn't go down without a fight was correct. Throughout the day, a voice on the mosque's PA system threatened the government with great bloodshed, exhorted the Taliban to be brave and fight, and declared jihad. As the sun set, gunfire pierced the sky (and the short-lived ceasefire agreement), and the lights in and around Lal Masjid never switched on. In the pitch black, packs of gun-toting madrassa students roamed the streets in the front of the mosque, guarding it from attack.

While Musharraf and his advisors were reportedly in a meeting, hashing out the particulars of the larger military operation in the offing, the PA system at Lal Masjid once again crackled to life: "The blood of the martyrs will not go to waste. We are ready for suicide attacks." The push to uproot Ghazi and his boys from Lal Masjid in the following days was necessary for Musharraf in order not to lose the confidence of the army, but it would mean an awfully bloody time for the country.

By the end of the first day, Ghazi's militants had killed one paramilitary Ranger and razed the nearby offices of the Ministry of Environment. By nightfall, Ghazi had bunkered



*Two army personnel shoulder weapons and prepare to head back into battle against the militants holed up inside Lal Masjid.*

down inside the mosque. The eight-day siege began.

**OVER THE FIRST FEW DAYS** of the siege, it looked as though Ghazi might negotiate his way out. He called in to local TV stations and talked about laying down his arms in exchange for safe passage. Considering the government's prior record of appeasement, and Ghazi's penchant for slick talk, it seemed possible. A French journalist on vacation in Paris called an Irish friend of mine in Islamabad and asked whether he should get on the next flight to Pakistan. "That depends. Do you consider Ghazi a politician or a jihadi?" my friend replied. The Frenchman took his time coming.

As the siege continued, however, Ghazi morphed from an outspoken extremist with a perma-smirk into a bona fide terrorist. During the first few days, more than 1,200 of his students surrendered to security forces. But by Friday, Ghazi and his men were threatening suicide attacks and holding women and children hostage as human shields. Jihadi gunmen fired at those who tried to escape. A father who approached the gate of the mosque compound to ask for his son was shot in the leg by masked gunmen, who told him to scram. For nine days, the exchange of rifle- and machine-gun fire made Islamabad sound like a giant bag of microwave popcorn. Everyone complained about bad sleep. Around midnight, just before heading to bed, I would walk up on my third-story patio and watch the glow of fireballs coming from the mosque as commandos lobbed explosives to destroy the walls that rimmed the compound. The last four nights, I woke up again around 3 a.m. to huge explosions. By the middle of the siege, the same foreign journalists once charmed by Ghazi's articulate and witty ways were cursing him for depriving them of sleep.

The government imposed a curfew in the neighborhood immediately surrounding Lal Masjid, even shutting off the electricity and gas in order to deny Ghazi those luxuries. For two hours a day, the curfew was lifted and "mobile utility stores" — trucks loaded with milk, rice, lentils, cooking oil, tea, and other staples — made the rounds.

During the curfew break on Friday, I teamed up with a couple of reporter friends who worked for big papers, and we hustled over to the Holiday Inn, the closest hotel to Lal Masjid, to take a few rooms. Except for a handful of Pakistani journalists also holed up there, the place was completely abandoned. The management tried to charge \$225 a night, but my big-budget friends talked them down to \$100 — "the stand-off special," as one called it. But with the razor wire preventing people from getting close and the blackout preventing anyone from seeing what was going on, the only advantage the Holiday Inn provided was being able to hear the sound of bullets whizzing through the trees and that the bombs were a little louder. I stayed one night and decided that my house, just a mile down the road, offered a much cheaper, and safer, base.

Over the next few days, government spokesmen al-

leged that foreign militants, a euphemism for al-Qaeda, were among those inside the mosque defending Ghazi. On Sunday night, local stations reported that a Predator drone, the same ones used by Americans to chase terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan, buzzed over the city. The next night, a delegation of senior mullahs tried to persuade Ghazi to free the women and children inside. When they failed, the final phase of the commando operation — codenamed "Operation Silence" — started at 3:30 Tuesday morning. I was enjoying my first decent night's sleep in a week.

**SINCE THE OPERATION BEGAN AGAINST LAL MASJID**, neo-Taliban groups in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province have suicide-bombed military convoys, attacked several police stations, and blocked the Karakorum Highway in protest. In the lawless tribal area of Bajaur, 20,000 tribesmen, some shouldering rocket-propelled grenades, rallied in support of Ghazi and encouraged him to "embrace martyrdom." Maulvi Faqir Mohammad, a well-known mujahid, told the gathering, "We beg Allah to destroy Musharraf, and we will seek revenge for the atrocities perpetrated on the Lal Masjid."

On July 27, the government tried to re-open Lal Masjid for Friday prayers. In an attempt to erase the memory of the Red Mosque, they painted it soft yellow and named a new mullah to lead the prayers. But many of the worshippers who came to pray also brought buckets of red paint with them, and they quickly got to work repainting the mosque its original color. And the government-appointed mullah never made it inside the mosque, before threats and angry chants convinced him that he wasn't welcome. Moreover, when a handful of senior politicians from Jamaat-i-Islami tried to enter, they too were turned away. "Where were you when our brothers and sisters were being killed a few weeks ago?" Ghazi's hardcore followers asked the politicians, "You were off doing politics." A couple hours later, a suicide bomber killed 13 people, mostly policemen, in a nearby market. The government declared that it would close Lal Masjid indefinitely. Not only did that Friday show that the episode was far from over, it also exposed a deep fissure between the established Islamists in Pakistan, and the new generation of militants.

A few weeks before his death, Ghazi had offered to introduce me to Maulvi Faqir, one of the leaders of this new generation. Ghazi said he'd write me a letter, but we both ran out of time, and I never stopped by to get it. Maybe Faqir will trust that Ghazi and I used to be chummy. But without his golden, handwritten reference, it's not worth taking a chance. □

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*Note: Parts of this newsletter previously appeared in the New Republic and the online magazine Slate.*

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# INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

## Current Fellows

**Kay Dilday • FRANCE/MOROCCO • October 2005 - December 2007**

Kay is studying the relationships of the French and North African immigrants in France and in North Africa. A former editor for The *New York Times* Op-Ed page, Kay holds a master's degree in comparative international politics and theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a bachelor's degree in English literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the Universiteit van Amsterdam in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*.

**Suzy Hansen • TURKEY • April 2007 - 2009**

A John O. Crane Memorial Fellow, Suzy will be writing about politics and religion in Turkey. A former editor at the *New York Observer*, her work has also appeared in *Salon*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Nation*, and other publications. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1999.

**Derek Mitchell • INDIA • September 2007 - 2009**

As a Phillips Talbot Fellow, Derek will explore the impact of global trade and economic growth on Indians living in poverty. He has served for the past year as a volunteer for Swaraj Peeth, an institute in New Delhi dedicated to nonviolent conflict resolution and Mahatma Gandhi's thought. Previously he was a Fulbright scholar in India at the Gandhi Peace Foundation. He has coordinated foreign policy research at George Washington University's Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies and worked as a political organizer in New Hampshire. Derek graduated with a degree in religion from Columbia University.

**Nicholas Schmidle • PAKISTAN • February 2006 - 2008**

Nick is a freelance writer interested in the intersection of culture, religion, and politics in Asia. He's in Pakistan as an ICWA fellow, examining issues of ethnic, sectarian, and national identity. Previously, he reported from Central Asia and Iran. His work has been published in the *Washington Post*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and elsewhere. He holds a master's degree in International Affairs from American University.

**Raphael Soifer • BRAZIL • April 2007-2009**

An actor, director, playwright, musician and theatre educator, Raphi Soifer is a Donors' Fellow studying, as a participant and observer, the relationship between the arts and social change in communities throughout Brazil. He has worked as a performer and director in the United States and Brazil, and has taught performance to prisoners and underprivileged youth through People's Palace Projects in Rio de Janeiro and Community Works in San Francisco. He holds a bachelor's degree in Theatre Studies and Anthropology from Yale University.

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Phone: (202) 364-4068  
Fax: (202) 364-0498  
E-mail: [icwa@icwa.org](mailto:icwa@icwa.org)  
Web site: [www.icwa.org](http://www.icwa.org)

**Executive Director:**  
Steven Butler

**Bookkeeper/Program Asst:**  
James Guy

**Publications Manager:**  
Ellen Kozak

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