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Prior to his academic appointments, Schanzer was the Democratic Staff Director for the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security from 2003-2005. He previously served as the legislative director for Senator Jean Carnahan (2001-2002), counsel to Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (1996- 1998), and counsel to Senator William S. Cohen (1994-1996). His positions in the executive branch include Special Counsel, Office of General Counsel, Department of Defense (1998-2001) and Trial Attorney, United States Department of Justice (1992- 94). Schanzer was a clerk for United States District Judge Norma L. Shapiro and in the Office of the Solicitor General of the United States.

Schanzer is a graduate of Harvard College where he received a B.A. cum laude in Government in 1985 and Harvard Law School, where he was as an editor of the Harvard Law Review from 1988-1989.

Schanzer is the lead author of two National Institute of Justice funded studies “The Challenge and Promise of Using Community Policing Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism” (2015) and “Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim Americans” (2010). He has appeared on international, national and local media analyzing counterterrorism and homeland security issues and has authored over 50 op-ed columns. Schanzer has taught two massive, open, on-line courses (MOOCs) with Coursera that have been taken by thousands of students around the globe. He appears in a weekly podcast – “On Security” that is available on I-Tunes U and tweets under the username @schanzerdavid.