

SCHANZER: Hello and thank you for joining us today. I'm Jonathan Schanzer, Senior Vice President for Research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. We're glad to have you tuning in to today's important discussion.

Today's discussion marks the release of the Arabic translation of Bari Weiss's award-winning book, *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*. We're pleased to have with us today experts to discuss not just the book itself, but why an Arabic translation is so important, in light of the antisemitism that is so prevalent today in the Arab world.

Before I introduce our speakers, a bit of background about FDD. We are a non-partisan policy institute focused on national security and foreign policy. FDD is a source for timely research, analysis, and policy options. We host three centers on American power in the areas of military and political power, economic and financial power, and cyber and technology innovation, all with the aim of using all instruments of American power to produce actionable research and develop policy options to strengthen U.S. national security. A note—we take neither foreign government nor foreign corporate funding and never will.

Today's program is one of many FDD hosts throughout the year. For more information on the work that we do, we encourage you to visit our website: FDD.org.

With that, I am pleased to introduce our panel today:

First we have Bari Weiss, who is an award-winning journalist and author of *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*. From 2017 to 2020 she was an opinion writer and editor at *The New York Times*. Before that, she wrote for *The Wall Street Journal* and *Tablet*. Today, she runs the popular "Common Sense" Substack and hosts a podcast called "Honestly."

Next is my colleague, Hussain Abdul-Hussain, who is a research fellow at FDD. He previously worked at Beirut's *The Daily Star*. He reported from war zones such as on the Lebanese border with Israel, and from Iraq. In Washington, Hussain helped set up and manage the Arabic satellite network *Alhurra Iraq*, after which he headed the Washington Bureau of the Kuwaiti daily *Alrai*.

And finally, we have Faisal Saeed Al Mutar. Faisal is the president and founder of Ideas Beyond Borders. IBB's mission is to share, translate and promote ideas that foster critical thinking, civil rights, science, and pluralism, to the Middle East. Born in Iraq, Faisal became a refugee in the United States in 2013. He received the "President's Volunteer Service Award" in 2015.

We are very grateful to have these experts join us today for this very important discussion.

Let me kick off the conversation by just saying congratulations. First, of course, to Bari for producing such an important book, *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*, which has earned well deserved accolades here in America. I also want to congratulate Faisal and his team at Ideas Beyond Borders. Their Arabic translation of Bari's book makes it available for a wider audience that can truly benefit from reading it. The book, I should add, also has a wonderful forward written by FDD's own Hussain Abdul-Hussain, who is FDD's resident expert on Gulf Affairs. So a warm welcome to all three of you.

And as we dive into the substance of Bari's book today and why it's so important to discuss it in the Arab world, I think it's important to acknowledge the brave intellectuals who have fought this battle in the past and paid the ultimate price. Today, I'm thinking about Mazin Latif, a name our audience may not know. Mazin Latif was an Iraqi author who published a number of books about the history of Jewish people in Iraq. Then in 2019, he was kidnapped and killed by

militias affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Faisal, maybe if you wouldn't mind just to tell us a bit more about Mazin Latif's story. I think it's an important way to start our discussion today.

AL MUTAR: Sure, thanks for having me. Mazin's biggest crime was telling Iraqis about their own history. He has written six books, mainly discussing the contributions and the positive contributions of Iraqi Jews from the beginning of modern Iraq, and that is something that many subsequent governments that came in after the kingdom tried to erase. He has been an advocate to restore our relations with Jewish people and restore Iraqi Jews to go back to their home country. And this is unfortunately a crime in his country, in which from the beginning he published his first book, and I know we are in a lot of mutual friends and circles.

I know that he's been constantly threatened by many militias, whether directly or indirectly in which they send someone to the Mutanabbi Street where he is mostly located, and they tell him, you cannot say something positive about Jews. This is a line you cannot cross. And he kept doing it, and that's really the heroism that he eventually paid the price for. But it's something that I can see living with a lot of his friends, with the people within the circle of publishing who will continue his message. I hope that this book will also be part of the continuation of the message that Iraqi Jews and antisemitism is a cancer to Iraq and is something that should be challenged in Iraq and all over the world.

SCHANZER: Yeah, thanks Faisal. It really is remarkable when you think about the contributions that the Jewish community made to Iraq in decades past, and then of course we recall the Farhud, we recall some of the terrible things that happened to the community there. I think all of it's incredibly important to share and I'm glad that these efforts continue. Maybe let me just follow up with you for a second, if you could just tell us a little bit more about the challenges that publishers face today in Iraq and perhaps other Arab states. I know this is not something that is unfamiliar to you.

AL MUTAR: Sure. So, the main challenge is the red line about what will be censored, what will be punished for, is constantly changing. So, it's really hard to keep up what will really "trigger the militias", what will cause them to actually kill somebody. Because sometimes they start with just purely sending someone indirectly, whether it's Asaib Ahl al-Haq or the other militias, in which they walk to some of the publishers and the people we work with and they tell them, we don't like you publishing that. And sometimes nothing really happens as a result of that. But then eventually, as what happened with Mazin and others is people get actually killed. I call that the violent cancel culture, in which people get not just canceled in which they are banned from participating in society, but they're in constant threat. Some of them have to reallocate to other countries and sometimes other places in Iraq like the Kurdistan Region, in which they go for their safety.

Sometimes they target their family members, in which they send a message to that publisher through their family member. That actually what happened with Bari's book. We have contacted a couple of publishers asking them if they can actually print that book, as we have done with a lot of other books that actually some of them made up to the festival, and he said, "well, I already got so many death letters of people telling me that I cannot publish books like that. And I really apologize for not being allowed to print it." And that really happened just a couple weeks ago. And that's just one challenge of the many in terms of the lack of government support and sometimes government protection for publishers and also journalists who write about these subjects.

SCHANZER: So just to be clear, is this an Iranian-backed militia problem? Is it an Iraqi problem? Is it an Arab problem? Where do you identify as the center of the problem?

AL MUTAR: It's everything. I mean, the challenge now in Baghdad is that most of the militias at the moment are the Iranian-backed ones. Back in my time, and the reason I am in the United States is because I ended up on a couple of death lists by Al-Qaeda of Iraq, which is AQI and in west Baghdad where I used to work. And now, in a way they look like peace activists, compared to ISIS and some of the militias that exist in today's age. So, when it comes to Iraq, Iranian-backed militias now have a very strong hold in Baghdad. With other states, it's mostly governments, where there is more stability in which really the government is responsible for the censorship. The countries that don't have militias, like the ones in Iraq and Lebanon and some other places. So it really depends.

As you probably know with "Wonder Woman" the movie, there was some censorship in Lebanon, from Hezbollah and other groups. So unfortunately censorship is a very common theme, and that's the reason why we exist. I mean, as an organization, we deal when the local publishers are not allowed to publish some of these books, they come to us. And authors in many cases, come to us and tell us, "my book is not allowed to be published in mainstream publishers or local publishers in the region. I want my ideas to come across. Can you help us with Ideas Beyond Borders as an organization that is mostly digital based." It's for us to be, in which we become the publisher and spread the books and all of these knowledge utilizing tools that actually circumvent some of the censorship methods that many regimes in the region use.

SCHANZER: Thanks, Faisal. And of course, the discussion there about "Wonder Woman" stemmed from the fact that Gal Gadot, an Israeli actress is the lead there. And I guess that was the thing that prompted some of the controversy. Which of course leads me to a question for you who, Hussain, let me shift to you, where I think the line that we hear coming out of Arab governments is that they're simply opposed to Israel or they're opposed to Zionism, but not to Jews and not to Judaism. How would you respond to that?

ABDUL-HUSSAIN: I think you're right, Jon, and that's not only the governments, even the common folks, the people, they have this imaginary tolerance toward Jews. They say that we have nothing against the Jews only against Israel and its policies toward the Palestinians. But in any given week, if you look up the news, you will find a dozen of antisemitic incidents. For example, this past month in December, we had two incidents that went largely unnoticed in Western media. The first was ADL published something about Kuwait textbooks, and it seems that in Kuwait, they teach students that there's a problem with the character of the Jews. The Jews have been treacherous all along since the days of Prophet Muhammad and they go on and on. Nothing in these textbooks say anything about Israel or the Israeli government.

On December 18, the Iraqi annual book fair closed and before it closed, there was a huge issue of censorship. An Egyptian publishing house had on display a book that suggested that Israel and Iran were two sides of the same coin that the Shia, in fact, were Jews who were hiding, who were acting as a fifth column. And of course, it's a book that's just really revived all the conspiracy theories that have been around for some time.

Now, what happened is that the Shia were angry, naturally, but instead of saying, okay, we're not Jews, but there's nothing wrong with being Jews. They said, we're not Jews. You, the ones who are accusing us are the Jews. And then the word Jews became a curse word. So these are two examples of how there is animosity toward the Jews. Antisemitism is deep and wide, and these incidents illustrate how nothing there was about Israel or the Palestinians. It was only about Jews. And it was what we call here, antisemitism. And that's why I think the effort by Faisal in translating Bari's book was really important for the Arab reader to read and understand.

SCHANZER: Agreed. You know, it's funny, I'm just hearing these anecdotes from you. I'm recalling A, one of the most popular bookstores in Cairo and some of the deeply antisemitic books. I mean, some of the older tracks,

Mein Kampf and *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, these popular books, admittedly, this is 20 years ago, but from what I understand, this is still the case today, which is obviously lamentable, to put it mildly. And then the other thing that you mentioned just about the word Jew being kind of a derogatory term, I can recall on a number of travels to different places around the Arab world, just the word yahud, that was the sort of slang way of putting someone down. And it's obviously incredibly unfortunate that this is still a staple in kind of the slang of the Arab world.

Bari, let me bring you into the discussion, now. Your book obviously highlights a number of very important themes. I wish we could tackle all of them, but let me start with a few. Let me start first with this distinction that you make in the book between what you call Purim antisemitism and Hanukkah antisemitism. This is of course, a reference to two different Jewish holidays. Maybe let's just start with explaining the difference that you've identified there.

WEISS: Sure. And first of all, I just want to say I'm so excited to be here and just a huge fan of IBB and FDD and all other acronyms, and just incredibly grateful. I can't think of a language that I feel this book is needed in more than Arabic, and that you guys made this happen, is just incredible. And especially honored to have the introduction from Hussain. So thank you.

Okay. Purim antisemitism and Hanukkah antisemitism. This is an idea that I borrowed from the great Jewish scholar Dara Horn. If people haven't read her book, *People Love Dead Jews*, it's an amazing title, I highly recommend it. And the distinction is really about antisemitism that is bold and explicit and doesn't require a Talmudic debate. It is an antisemitism that sort of comes cloaked in the language of progressivism and progress and universal humanity.

So, in the Purim story, of course, without going into all of the details, people can pick up the Book of Esther, if they want to understand it, there is essentially a Hitler-like figure, and he says, we're going to kill all the Jews. And that's what he aspires to do. And so, when I talk about Purim antisemitism, I'm talking about the antisemitism of the neo-Nazi, the white supremacist that walked into the synagogue, Tree of Life, where I became a bat mitzvah in Pittsburgh and said, "kill all the Jews, or all Jews must die," and then killed 11 of my neighbors. That is Purim antisemitism. Purim antisemitism is easy to spot. It is the kind of antisemitism that announces itself and then tries to fulfill it. And many of us, I think are acutely aware of it, both because it is explicit and of course, because of recent history within living memory of what's happened in Europe with the show, "Out With the Holocaust."

Now Hanukkah antisemitism is a bit different and it's a bit more complicated. It basically says that, and this is the kind of antisemitism that we see in the Spanish inquisition or in the Soviet Union. It says you can be a Jew, no problem. All you need to do is to disavow X, Y, and Z thing. And so, for example, under the Hellenists, right in Jerusalem, in Judea 2000 years ago, what that meant was you need to not circumcise your sons. What it meant in the Soviet Union was you need to disavow God and disavow religiosity. And what it looks like now, increasingly, and this is the antisemitism often that comes from the far left, is you need to disavow Israel, or you need to disavow Jewish power, or you need to disavow Jewish particularism.

So, if one, if Purim antisemitism is the kind that comes at you with a gun to your head, Hanukkah antisemitism, excuse me, is more like a frog in boiling water if that makes sense. And oftentimes today it comes smuggled into the mainstream in language that is frankly a siren song to a lot of Jewish ears, because it claims to be on the right side of history. It claims to be on the side of righteousness. It claims to be on the side of progress, and who wouldn't want to be on the side of those things?

SCHANZER: I think it's interesting when we talk about the Arab context. I think we certainly see a lot of that Purim antisemitism in the vows to destroy Israel and to destroy the only Jewish state. And then we see that I think the Hanukkah antisemitism, as you call it in these countries themselves. Where Jews are certainly allowed to live there as long as they disavow certain things, including the state of Israel itself. So, I think it is very important for the discussion today. We follow up with another question for you on this, before we get back to Hussain and Faisal. But in your book, you actually talk about how identity politics makes it such that Jews are often rejected by both white nationalists, as well as by people of color. So the question is, I mean, it seems like Jews are betwixt and between. How did Jews navigate this political moment here in America? I think obviously our conversation today is largely about the Arab world, but it's hard for me not to ask this question today.

WEISS: Yeah. Well, just to explain it for one sentence further, and then I'll explain what I think we can be doing about it and what I'm personally trying to do about it, to the greatest extent possible. The language of America right now, right, is the language of race. It's not the language of religion or all of the other litmus tests that have been put to Jews in other times and places. So, the way that it looks right now is, we're getting called the neo-Nazis on the one hand and on the other hand, neo-Nazis are trying to kill us. Now, what do I mean by that? Right. The far right says we are the greatest trick the devil has ever played. We appear to be white people. We look like we're in the majority, we're incredibly successful, but in fact, and this was again, the motivation of the Pittsburgh killer.

And this is beyond him. In fact, we're disloyal to real, pure, white America. And in fact, we're loyal to Black people and brown people and Muslims and immigrants. The reason that the Pittsburgh killer selected Tree of Life was because the previous weekend, the previous Sabbath, the synagogue had participated in a refugee Shabbat. Right? And on the other hand, on the far left, it says that we are the exemplars, in a way, of white privilege. That yeah, we claim to be minorities, but look at us, look at how we pass. Look at how we were able to change our names, look at how we were able to sort of go into the slipstream of upper middle class, privileged American life. So not only are we guilty of being adjacent to white supremacy or upholding it by our participation in it, they say, we're also guilty of the other great sin of modern American progressivism.

So, we're guilty of racism or tacit racism, and we're guilty of colonialism. Why? Because we support Israel, and they regard Israel as the last standing bastion of white colonialism in the Middle East. And so the great mistake that I think much or some, let's say, of the American Jewish community is making is by trying to play the game. It's by trying to play a loser's game. And the loser's game is the Olympics of identity politics. It's the Olympics of victimhood. It's to say, "Wait, you say we're not oppressed. Let me show you how oppressed we are." To which I say, "That's a game we're never going to win. And it is a game fundamentally that is, in the end of the day, nihilistic and dead-end." The way that I think we fight this is by rejecting any notion of identity politics that pits us against each other, that sees identity and victimhood or purity as a kind of zero sum game.

So, any politics that claims there are real Americans, and there are fake Americans. That there are people who are more pure, or more belonging of the American history and experience. And there are those who just aren't, that is a politics, and that comes from the far right, that we should utterly and absolutely reject. And at the same time, on the far left a politics that claims that we're contained to the lane of our birth. That our gender or our sexual orientation or ethnicity or race, or our class determines our station in life.

That some of us are fundamentally oppressors and some of us are fundamentally oppressed. And that's just the way it is. All of this. And if there's one great lesson from Jewish history, perhaps it's this. All of this is deadly, not just for Jews, but for anyone who is different. And Jews are just often the first test of that case. And so, I mean, that's the number one

thing that we can do is reject it in our personal lives. Not pay it lip service, refuse to bend a knee to ideologies that are fundamentally dehumanizing and erasing our common humanity.

SCHANZER: Yeah. I think history shows again and again, the Jews have been the canary in the coal mine. Couldn't agree with that more. So, one more question, just to have you unpack the book a bit. So that our audience is fully aware of what we're talking about, what we're bringing to the Arab world. You talk about the Arab world in your book, you talk about how it borrows its antisemitic rhetoric from both the far left and the far right. I'd love to just hear a couple of examples of that. And then maybe just one other thing I'll just tack onto that. I was really intrigued by one passage in the book, noting the influence of the former Soviet Union, which promoted antisemitism, but also was a leading patron of many of the Arab states in the latter half of the 20th century. So curious where you see the Soviet Union playing a role perhaps in where we are today.

WEISS: Yeah. This was something that I really didn't know about when I set out to write this book, in the wake of what happened at Tree of Life. Like any college student, it was 15 years ago in my case and so what I experienced has only increased exponentially. But you heard often, even back then, the notion that Zionism was racism. And I didn't realize until doing research for this book that when 18-year-old college students who imagine themselves to be progressive are spouting that line what they're really expressing is a piece of Soviet propaganda. What happened was, is when the Soviet Union failed to defeat America's proxies via Israel in the Arab world, it shifted from a military strategy into a propagandistic one, if that's a word. And so, as the scholar Izabella Tabarovsky who, if people don't know her, I highly recommend looking up her work.

She has definitively shown in the most incredible way, more than anyone else that I've seen, the way that language and rhetoric was transformed from being about Jews, to being about Israel. And so, first of all, books, as you mentioned, Jon, before, like *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *Mein Kampf*, these were translated into Arabic. But really what happened was that Jewish power became Zionist power. Jewish bankers became Zionist bankers. The Jew as the Antichrist became the Jew as the anti-Soviet. Instead of presenting the Jew as the devil, they presented the Zionist as the Nazi. And so this notion that has been so normalized in a lot of sort of right-thinking progressive liberal circles, that there's a distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. When you look back to this Soviet history, a lot of that falls apart, and you see the way that words were just substituted in, one for the other.

So, I think that is extraordinarily important, something that gets incredibly overlooked. And in general, I would say that going back to your original question, the Purim antisemitism, Hitlerian antisemitism, antisemitism from the far right. For one reason or another, that is the kind that we are educated and inoculated against. And I'm talking both about the Jewish community and the broader American population. This kind of antisemitism is something that many people, most people, including most Jews really don't have a deep history about. And so a lot of times when the conversation happens in America about, "Can it happen here?" Well, of course, what people are thinking about is Holocaust-like antisemitism. Fascistic antisemitism, antisemitism from the far right. Often, they're not thinking about this other kind, and what happened to Jews right under the Soviet Union and regimes that have embraced this kind of antisemitism.

SCHANZER: That's a great point. And one I think I'd like to unpack with the rest of our panel here. So maybe Hussain, let me just start with you. You've obviously lived in the Arab world. That's where you do most of your reporting. It's what you observe day-to-day. Where do you see the influence right now? Is it from the far left, from the far right? Has it taken on a mind of its own in the Arab world? How would you describe what's happening there right now?

ABDUL-HUSSAIN: Jon, to pick up from where Bari left, I'd say that communism didn't really strike roots in the Arab world, even though there were Communist parties and socialist parties. We know that the Soviet Union was among the first countries to recognize the state of Israel. This posed a huge problem for the Arab Communist parties, because, and they're thinking division is along class lines. So it's poor Jews and poor Arabs versus rich Jews and rich Arabs. In which case, the identity politics wouldn't work. And in which case, Arab versus Jew doesn't work. So, if you look at the Israeli Communist Party, you will find that it has both Jews and Arabs and to some extent, this is how they operate. But the thing is that in most Arab countries, right and left didn't really operate the same way we're used to in the Western world.

So, the Ba'ath party, which is for example, which is secular, it became Sunni in Iraq. It became Alawite in Syria. The socialist party in Lebanon is Druze. So they just picked the name and the tribalism remained. And as long as tribalism remained, the cleavages, the divisions just persisted. What happened is that we know that antisemitism in Arab circles, it just goes through cycles. It ebbs and flows. And what happens is that some populist leaders sometimes decide to exploit the text that they have, and then other leaders decide to be more enlightened. So, what we see now, for example, with the Abraham Accords is that some governments decided to lead in a good way and they're having peace treaties. Not only peace treaties, they're having people-to-people, peace and normalization between the UAE, Bahrain and Israel.

On the other hand, sometimes you get governments and leaders who are populist enough, who try to use the rhetoric that they can find. And of course, if you go back to the Arab culture, which is of course influenced by the Quran, if you go there, you can get whatever you want of the Holy Book of Islam. You can get verses that are against the Jews, you can get verses that love the Jews. And what happens is that it depends on who's the government in power. They play up whichever verses that they think is in their favor. One last point on this, you might remember that when the Shah of Iran had a peace treaty, was actually an ally of Israel. Most of the Shia, even the Arab Shia, including Lebanon, considered themselves to be friends with the Jews and with Israel.

And when there was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978, there was the famous incident of the Shia just throwing rice and petals on the heads of the IDF troops. But then when Iran changed, when the regime was changed in Iran, then things changed for the Shia, because Iran started taking another line. So I'm saying is that you can find whatever you want in the text and the culture. And it depends on the government behavior. And of course, it depends on the behavior of the elite.

And at this point, I think what this book does is that it addresses the elite. It gives an alternative. It just says, "Look, what you hear, what you get as in terms of propaganda from the government, from the people who surround these radical governments, like in Iran or in Iraq. Or in Lebanon, what you get is not the only narrative. There are other arguments, there are other points that can be made about peace." At this point, it's unfortunate that Iran is forcing Iraq and Lebanon to treat peace like a bad thing. And that's books, people like Faisal, like myself, like everyone. We're trying to push back on this. And we hope that this gets somewhere positive in the end.

SCHANZER: Yeah. There's a lot to unpack with what you just put out there, Hussain. I am certainly interested in the role of Iran in ensuring that antisemitism remains in the bloodstream, in particular in the countries where it wields the kind of influence that it does. So in places like Iraq and Syria and Lebanon in particular right now. But Faisal, let me just turn to you for a second. We heard a bit about Arab nationalism. We heard a bit about Islam, Islamism. It's often where the two collide that we see some of the more toxic ideologies in the Middle East. And in Iraq, I think we've probably seen it more than maybe some other places. I'm curious to hear your take about how that has evolved in Iraq where I know you've done a lot of work.

I'm also interested in just getting your take about how this antisemitic, or the strain of antisemitism in the Arab world, how it's actually found its way into intellectual circles. That in the publishing world, someone like yourself, you face great challenges. A lot of other places, you have these defiant people in the publishing space that will go right ahead and challenge some of the common "wisdom", let's say. Right. But the idea that intellectuals, that's their job, and yet you find that it's just such a challenge in the Arab world right now. So I know I've given you a lot to chew on here, but feel free to weigh in.

AL MUTAR: Yeah. I mean, and I do want to get back to a bit of the Nazi Soviet. I mean, they actually started, that was mentioned in Mazin's book about translation movements that actually translated a lot of, so Iraq in many cases, the Middle East as a place in which where World War II powers were fighting, and also with the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany both had translation houses inside Iraq that translated a lot of the books from German into Arabic, and the same with the Soviet Union. That's how we actually got a lot of copies from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, et cetera, because they were distributed for free.

So, in a way we are the reverse Soviet Union, in this regard is that we're actually doing the opposite of – but doing it for enlightenment values and pluralism than for hate. So that's, I think, our market differentiation here.

In terms of in the Soviet Union and Communism in particular, it metastasized. We've done, actually, a very interesting Arab barometer report, which is an organization that addresses surveys in the Arab world and some in other places, is that mainly, the communist or the left-wing ideology was able to be more localized than, let's say, Western, let's say, capitalistic thinking, in which many people don't think of left-wing as a Western idea because it's mostly merged itself with the forces of anti-imperialism and the anti-Western narrative.

So, one of the main challenges, or I think there's a lot of relatability between the more Arab liberals and some of the Jewish experience is also we're hated by everybody. Right? We have the far right who thinks we are with the Muslim Islamic terrorists, and we have the far left who think we are not authentic Middle Easterners. Then we have the Islamic extremists who want to kill us. So I think we have a lot in common there.

With the far left in particular is that the people who adhere to this ideology, which is merged anti-imperialism equals anti-Israel equals anti-America and all of that stuff in which all viewed under one umbrella, it is not viewed as that you borrowed that line of thinking from the Soviets. It's viewed as that you are actually an intellectual in Arab lands, even though you're actually utilizing a lot of language that were coming from the communist Westerners.

While for example, if you are more on the right, or let's say you quote Adam Smith, or you quote more Western thinkers, you're viewed as a Westerner. You're actually sold your identity. Well, if you quote Karl Marx, you're viewed as a local intellectual. That's what I find really fascinating, is that the left-wing ideology has been able to be far more localized within the intellectual circles in which people don't think of themselves as westernized.

But if you say you are, you are viewed as a local anti-imperialist who fought against the West. But if you take another Western ideology, which is more of a free market ideology, you're viewed as a Westerner. I think that is really the – some extent as a defense mechanism, I think, is that because one of the largest opponents of all these ideologies, the Muslim Brotherhood, and some of the Islamic ideologies in which no, I'm more Arab than you, and everybody is really trying to challenge that in which everybody wants to sound more authentic than the other. Which is, in a way, a lot of language of identity politics being used, is that who is in a way more an authentic representation of the views?

I think one of the great things about this book, which I'm very happy of translating, one of the main narratives that even unfortunately is being pushed by a lot of intellectuals within the region, is that Jews control America. Generally, it's viewed through the lens in which Israel, in a way, controls America. The book that Bari wrote about really the challenges that Jews have here challenges that narrative of global Jewish domination.

That's really one of the lenses that one of the readers actually sent to us about, that he actually saw that this could be a very great, challenging narrative to this narrative that Jews control America, and they have it all great and they're on the top. All of them lived in 5th Avenue and they control everything in this planet. What Bari is doing is that actually the challenges that many Jews face here shows them that they're actually not the ones controlling the country from 5th Avenue. It's more complicated with that.

WEISS: That is fascinating to me, that that's a reaction to it. I really want to be connected to that reader.

AL MUTAR: Sure.

SCHANZER: Yeah. I was going to say if Jews are controlling the world, they're doing a pretty bad job right now given all the antisemitism that we see out there. It's kind of hard to make that argument. Bari, I'm going to turn back to you for a second here. I want to touch on a couple more themes that you wrote about that I think are probably worth unpacking for this discussion.

The first is how you noted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was courting some far-right politicians while also endeavoring to combat antisemitism. Admittedly, Bibi is now out of power, but how does this dynamic, in your view, complicate the fight against antisemitism in the United States, not to mention in the Arab world?

WEISS: I just think it makes it much harder. I wrote this book way before Bibi embraced, I think, the name of the party was Otzma Yehudit, which is like Jewish Power. These are disciples of Meir Kahane, who I think anyone would agree – although, I'm curious if you guys do – was a viciously anti-Arab militant whose party, which was called Kach was outlawed in Israel. So, the fact that Bibi was sort of reviving the husk of this party under a new guise was detestable to me and lots of other people, including Rabbi Benny Lau an extremely important rabbi in Israel.

I remember when that happened, he said that allowing this party and its supremacist ideology into the Knesset, into the Israeli parliament was akin to the destruction of the temple, which is the greatest tragedy in all of Jewish history. So, the thing that I think is heartening is how many Israelis are rejecting that, but I would also say that the rise of extremist ideology, let's just call it, but you could also call it ideologies based on supremacy and based on the kind of very noxious and dangerous identarian tribal ideas that we were talking about before, that is not unique to Israel. That is on the rise everywhere across the world right now.

That is something that I don't think we can solve in the hour that we have together, but I think that it's something that I am thinking about every single day right now and thinking about what role I can play, to the extent that I have any influence, to combat that. But I think it is a historic wave, of which Israel is only one tiny example. But I would definitely say for American Jews who still identify overwhelmingly as liberals and progressives, despite what's going on inside the Democratic party, which we can talk about, I think that having Bibi in power and embracing those groups have made their willingness to speak out on behalf of Israel, defend Israel, defend the notion that Jews, like any other people, have a right to a state and have a right to sovereignty, it's made them remain mum in a way that's been really unproductive.

SCHANZER: Yeah. The only thing that I maybe just maybe wonder out loud is Israel doing, or under Bibi, did Israel do anything that was that different than a lot of other countries where extremist factions have popped up where you see leaders placating the far left or the far right? I think we could even see it here in the United States to a certain extent within both parties.

WEISS: Yeah. I don't think it's unique to Israel at all. I think Jews all over the world feel a special connection to Israel. So, if Israel is meant to represent not just the survival and protection and safety, guaranteed safety of the Jewish people, but it's supposed to represent, and this is a very encoded idea, but Jewish values, whatever those are, and people see the Prime Minister of that state embracing a group of people that, in my understanding of Judaism and Jewish values, really don't, that just leads to incredible tension.

But no, Jon, I agree with you in that it's not unique at all. This is happening all over the world right now. Of course, there is an inordinate focus on Israel and the accusations against Bibi in terms of racism or supremacy or whatever word you want to use. The words are now constantly changing every single day, that also should not surprise us because everything that is Israel is news.

SCHANZER: Yeah. I think that's right. I'm going to shoot one more at you, Bari, and then I want to go back to Hussein and Faisal to talk a little bit about what's going on in the Arab world right now. But if you would talk to us just for a minute or two about your time at Columbia University. This is something that's near and dear to my heart, I guess I would put it. It's a toxic Middle Eastern Studies department over there, and that may only be the half of it as I understand it. You were studying there at a time, I think, of a lot more tumult than even what we see today. So perhaps just a few thoughts on what you saw while you were there?

WEISS: I think that I saw something earlier than other people on this score because the notion that, up until very, very recently, Jon, there was this idea that was shared by liberals and conservatives that what happened on campus stayed on campus. Yeah, you might have some weird ideas about any number of radical subjects, but if you move away from Oberlin or Vassar or Columbia or Yale or whatever lead institution and you make your way into the world and you get your job at McKinsey or wherever, that the radicalism and excesses of the college campus and its politics are going to be left behind.

But as IBB puts it on its website, ideas change the world. Ideas change the world, and I don't think we've seen, or at least in my life, a more obvious example of that than what we've seen from the generation that Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff capture beautifully in *The Coddling of the American Mind* that are now transforming the most important sense-making institutions in America from within. I'm of course talking about the media, but also frankly, Congress and the Senate and publishing houses. There's Norman Mailer's book that was just canceled probably because of some 26 year olds who were offended by words he wrote in the 1950s and so on and so forth. We all know there are hundreds and hundreds of cases at this point.

So, I saw the tip of that spear through the lens of a subject that I knew something about. That was the Jewish people and the state of Israel. I was in classes in which, and this speaks to the broader theme, that there was just total intellectual and political forced homogeneity. In other words, anyone that departed from the view that Israel was a settler colonialist state, that Israel was committing mass crimes, maybe even genocide, and that to be a Zionist was to be a racist, well, that was to put yourself outside of the community of the good. That was to put yourself on the wrong side of history.

So, in an environment, let's say, where the assumption is that Zionism is racism and that is what all of these professors were teaching, well, guess what happens in an environment where everyone is taught to believe that Zionism is racism? Well, then Zionists become racist. Most Jews identify as Zionist. In other words, they believe in the right of the State of Israel to exist. So that was my early experience. I sometimes joke that I'm living in groundhog day, just in bigger and bigger purchase, which is to say that I saw really intimately the dangers of being in an environment where only one view was accepted and the demonization of anyone that held a different view.

At the time, Jon, I did not have the confidence to call this antisemitism, but I pulled a quote just to give people a sense of what was happening at the time. This is a quote from a professor called Hamid Dabashi, who was then the head of the Middle East Studies Department when I was at school. This is what he wrote in 2004.

"Half a century of systemic maiming and murdering of another people has left its deep marks on the faces of Israeli Jews. There is a vulgarity of character that is bone deep and structural to the skeletal vertebrae of its culture."

That was the head of the Middle East Studies Department when I was a student there. The main thing that we were trying to insist upon at the time is obviously, academic freedom, obviously, tenure. There was nothing we could do about a professor like that. But at least have the respect for your students to allow them to express a different viewpoint in the classroom, but that wasn't possible. That was my first experience, frankly, of standing against the grain and saying things that other people didn't agree with and having people call me terrible names because of it.

In a way, I guess I need to thank my experience at Columbia because it definitely set me on a path toward journalism, on a path toward being willing to stand up for the values that I believe into the deepest reaches of my soul, and frankly, the beginning of growing the thick skin that's necessary if you want to do that these days in American public life.

SCHANZER: Yeah. Yeah. It sounds like that that was a formative experience. Unfortunately, I think—

WEISS: Hey John, can I add one thing?

SCHANZER: Of course.

WEISS: At the time, those of us who were trying to sound the alarm on this inside the American Jewish community and more broadly, we were waved away by people in positions of power. We were told that this was just a detail, that this would go away, that we were making a mountain out of a mole hill. I really believe that the ideas that you are marinating in, in the most formative intellectual years of your life make an enormous difference.

I just want to tie that back to the mission that Faisal is pursuing with IBB which is to reach people and hopefully reach young people who are maybe—they're not at Columbia. They're not on the Upper West side of Manhattan, but they're in places around the world where they are also in environments of intellectual orthodoxy. They are looking maybe for a different perspective. That getting them exposed to books like Steven Pinker's and the others that IBB are translating are just enormously important.

I know for me, obviously in an extremely different context and I'm not comparing them but being in that environment and being the kind of person that wanted a different view, the kind of books and essays and I remember them, that I read at the time, one of them was *Closing of the American Mind* and I was like, how did he see everything

that was going to happen 30 years before? But reading books felt like breathing air honestly. Being exposed to a different perspective at the time made me feel less lonely and really changed the course of my life.

SCHANZER: Well, unfortunately I think we're still seeing a lot of that. What you saw at Columbia is persisting. We're seeing a lot of the same characters still running the show over there and that doesn't portend well.

But I do think that when you have voices that come from the region that come to teach here in the United States, particularly in the field of Middle Eastern studies, I think that's always been the problem is I think they wanted to bring a certain perspective to the United States, a certain organic Middle Eastern perspective. I do think that books like yours when they're translated into Arabic can begin to chip away. I think that is of course where Faisal is trying to make a difference.

Look, we've covered a good bit of bad news throughout this discussion. I do want to note that there are some positive developments particularly in the Arab world. I noted one of them in my new book, *Gaza Conflict 2021*. I noted that the war between Israel and Hamas in May of last year, that there was far less vitriolic discussion of Israel. Let's just put it that way. That it was more muted than in the conflicts of the past.

So, Hussain, you've just returned from the UAE. Is that your sense? I mean, have the Abraham Accords helped to change perceptions of the general population? Is it governments that are leading the way? Is it the people? Is it a bit of both top down, bottom up? How do we understand some of these new trends?

ABDUL-HUSSAIN: I think the Abraham Accords absolutely changed things in the UAE. I've visited Jordan and Egypt in the past. Even though these two countries have had peace treaties with Israel since decades now, for decades now. You don't see the regular Israelis just walking down the street in Cairo for example whereas you see Israelis with Kippahs on their heads and even they're speaking in Hebrew anywhere in Dubai which was really interesting for me to see.

The second thing was that, remember that the UAE has become the place where most Arabs go to live and work and raise their families especially Arabs from countries who are at war with Israel. For example, Lebanon and Syria. These guys who are instructed in their home countries to look at Israel as the eternal enemy, to look at Jews as the eternal enemy.

These Lebanese people and Syrians and Iraqis and everybody else, they get to see Israelis. They get to hang out with them. They get to work with them. So it's changing a lot of minds. I've talked to many Lebanese friends who I've known since forever who live now in Dubai. To my surprise, their opinions about peace with Israel, their opinions about Israel and Jews has changed substantially.

So, this shows that governments can lead the way in terms of peace. Of course, it's still an uphill battle. In most Arab countries, it's much easier to come out as being from the LGBT community than to say you want peace with Israel and you're only asking for peace. You're not even asking for war or anything else.

But I think it is positive. I think the Abraham Accords are positive. I think Egypt and Jordan might be trying to maybe heat up their peace with Israel. Maybe other countries will follow but on my trip, I only saw positive signs that I hope that everybody can build on for further peace between the Arabs and Israelis.

SCHANZER: That's certainly heartening to hear. Faisal, let me ask you, are you seeing change? I mean, I know that's your mission. I know that's what you're fighting for but are you actually seeing change on the ground in the Arab world? Anything in particular. I mean, I think pulling on a thread that Bari put out there. It's the youth that we're thinking about the most, right? Those formative years. Are you seeing changes among the youth in the Middle East?

AL MUTAR: Definitely and in a positive direction. I mean, we have roughly about 5.5 million subscribers around the Arab world, starting from Iraq all the way to Morocco. Our most watched video was actually about an Egyptian Jew. His name is Raymond Schinazi who discovered a cure that dated back to Egypt. Most of the comments were positive.

To get on what Bari is saying is that people especially in many places in which they have seen the failures of both the Arab Socialist with the Ba'ath Party followed by the Islamic states in the case in most on other places and they've seen the failure of the Islamists. They're looking for an alternative narrative. That's what I think we come in as an organization, is that we are the alternative narrative. I think the first thing to start with I think especially when it comes to the subject of Jewish relations, let's say, is the language of humanization.

For years and decades, many of these people through the education system, through the media, through et cetera which most of them was controlled by the state, they have received all types of negative images and portrayals of Jews their entire lives. I think that wearing my counter extremism hat for a bit, I think that the first thing and what we have done with the story of Raymond Schinazi, we have also highlighted a lot of positive contributions of Jewish people into the Middle East at large.

We are seeing some change of perception, at least a lot of positive comments coming from people. Number one, saying that they have never heard of that story. That they would love to know more and they would love to read more resources. So I think is that that's where we as an organization, I think especially on this subject and also on other subjects is to be that leading organization of enlightenment for the alternative narrative into the region.

The fact that we were able to get – We are only five years old and we're turning to have 5 million subscribers. I think that says something about really the demand for such content. When I started the organization with it, I didn't think that the demand would be that high for something like Steven Pinker's book which was printed by a lot of Iraqi local protestors or John Stuart Mill *On Liberty* which is something we have actually done in partnership with Heterodox Academy here in the states.

So, the demand for content like this is pretty high. I mean, there are a lot of black markets for books in Telegram and Signal and all of other places in which people are spreading many of these bad materials. I mean there is a proverb in Arabic that says *Mamnou' marghoub*. So, in many cases when these – It means what is prohibited is wanted.

In many cases when these governments and they have seen how bad, how much they suck in governing and they have seen how they – Many people are like, if these people are telling me the Jews are evil, let me at least see what the alternative is. Because the lack of trust in these institutions, the government institutions is very low.

That's why I think in a more grassroots approach than depending on Arab governments to lead the way. Even though in some cases, I mean, Arab governments like the UAE have a very powerful media through *Al Arabiya* and multiple other channels. They own a lot of the music channels also, Rotana and others. So, they are able to influence culture on a larger scale but I would like to make it less dependent on these governments because they might switch every – whatever the mood of the day is.

I think I would rather go with like a more grassroots approach and changing the minds of the youth and let them take this as ideas on their own. Hopefully they will lead the charge in their own countries.

SCHANZER: Okay. We're about to wrap up here Faisal. I just want to ask, are there other books in the queue right now? Are there other languages by the way that that Bari's book can be translated into? Is that IBB's job? But just curious what else are – our audience may want to know about your efforts?

AL MUTAR: Definitely. I mean, we would love to make Bari's book available in Farsi. We actually have a team that does Farsi translations. We have simply expanded to both languages in Afghanistan and also in Iran. So we would love to make that available. We actually have a distribution channel in Farsi as well. So maybe that's next. But what we're working on right now is actually a book by Mustafa Akyol called *Reopening Muslim Minds* which is about Islamic enlightenments and actually where they can find sources of where they can find hope in that region.

We just finished the translation of Steven Pinker's *Rationality*. There will be more and more of these books. We are planning to do almost a book every month. So our capacity of actually translating and making things available is only increasing. Also we're now a video magnet. So we do a lot of videos to actually make people interested in these ideas. We had 60 million views last year. We're hoping to double that this year and try to get more momentum for these ideas and change the narrative in the region.

SCHANZER: That's terrific. We wish you the best of luck. We're going to end it here. I want to thank you all for participating today and for providing your insight on these important issues. Bari, thank you for writing such an important book. Faisal, thank you for translating it into Arabic. Hussain, thanks for writing a terrific forward. Thank you our audience for watching. For more information on FDD and our latest events and research, we encourage you to visit fdd.org. We hope to see you again soon. Thank you.

WEISS: Thank you.

ABDUL-HUSSAIN: Thank you.

AL MUTAR: Thank you.