

Israel's military "investigation" whitewashes murder of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh

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Israel's military investigation declared Monday that there was a "high possibility" that *Al Jazeera Arabic's* Palestinian reporter Shireen Abu Akleh had been "accidentally hit" by "an Israeli soldier while under fire who was using a telescopic scope and misidentified her as an armed Palestinian gunman."

Its report also claimed it was impossible to identify with certainty whether she had been hit by Israeli fire, as there were armed Palestinian gunmen in the vicinity.

The Israeli Military Advocate General's Office refused to open a criminal or disciplinary investigation into any soldiers involved in the incident as "there is no suspicion that a criminal offense was committed," even though she was a journalist killed in the line of duty—a clear violation of international law.

The report confirms that Israel's military apparatus has carte blanche to carry out any criminal action it wants with legal immunity.

Shireen Abu Akleh, a US-Palestinian citizen, had reported on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israel's occupation of the West Bank for *Al Jazeera Arabic* for more than 20 years. She was shot by Israeli forces while covering an army raid on Jenin in the occupied West Bank on May 11.

Clad in a press vest and helmet and standing in open view near a roundabout, there is no question that she was deliberately targeted and shot by Israeli snipers along with her co-producer Ali Sammoudi, who was hospitalized, as numerous investigations have concluded.

Israeli officials sought to pin the blame for Abu Akleh's death on the Palestinians, denying any possibility that Israeli troops had killed her since "the army opens fire only in an orderly, controlled manner." Days later, as it became apparent that her murder was turning into a public relations disaster, officials went into damage control,

proposing a joint Israeli-Palestinian investigation, which the Palestinian Authority rejected outright.

The army then accepted the "possibility" that Israeli gunfire had "inadvertently" killed the veteran journalist. A week later the army announced that it had found the rifle that "had likely killed her" before absurdly claiming that the source of the shot was unclear. As a sop to international public opinion, it promised a "thorough examination" of the events.

Abu Akleh's murder was part of a long-running attempt to terrorise journalists and prevent their reporting on Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians. She was the 31st journalist to be killed since 2000 in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israeli soldiers, none of whom were ever prosecuted. Israel receives the backing of the major imperialist powers which support Israel's crimes while flaunting their "human rights" pretensions across the Middle East and Ukraine in pursuit of their geo-strategic interests. In May 2021, Israel's bombing of a tower block in Gaza that housed the offices of *Al Jazeera* and other media organisations was met with a collective tut-tutting from the major imperialist centres and their corporate media.

After Abu Akleh's death, Israeli police stormed her family's home demanding mourners take down Palestinian flags and end the gathering and singing. On the day of the funeral, the police gave pall bearers such a beating that they nearly dropped the coffin. Soldiers fired sponge-tipped bullets and threw stun grenades at the crowds gathered at the hospital morgue until Abu Akleh's family were forced to whisk her coffin away in a car as a police officer removed the Palestinian flags covering it.

Israel's month-long investigation was a whitewash from start to finish, shot through with inconsistencies and glaring contradictions it did not attempt to reconcile.

It claimed that it was impossible to be sure who fired the fatal shots as Palestinian gunmen were firing towards an Israeli army vehicle and could have shot her by mistake. According to *Ha'aretz*, citing a senior Israeli army official, "One of the soldiers believed Abu Akleh was part of the armed militants who fired at them, and he shot at her through a telescopic scope." The official insisted, "It needs to be said that there were both IDF soldiers and Palestinians at the scene."

At least nine other investigations, including those carried out by the media and the United Nations, cited numerous witnesses saying there were no exchanges of fire before Abu Akleh was shot. Furthermore, she was shot in a relatively open site and was clearly visible as a member of the press. Before the soldier fired and killed her, he or another soldier shot journalist Ali al-Samoudi and wounded him in the shoulder.

While the report said that an Israeli soldier had shot at her through a telescopic sight, it could not identify the soldier who had made the statement. At the very least, the army would know who had been issued with that rifle.

Israel's investigation mimicked one carried out by Israel's paymasters in Washington published on July 4 that examined the bullet extracted from Abu Akleh's body and also found that shots fired from the position of Israeli soldiers were "likely responsible" for her death. That report claimed that damage to the bullet made it difficult to draw a definitive conclusion about the gun that fired it and found that her killing was accidental.

Abu Akleh's family denounced the US report as "an affront to justice that enabled Israel to avoid accountability for Shireen's murder." It was tantamount to accepting Shireen's killing, they said, adding, "Your administration's actions can only be seen as an attempt to erase the extrajudicial killing of Shireen and further entrench the systemic impunity enjoyed by Israeli forces and officials for unlawfully killing Palestinians."

President Joe Biden refused to meet the family during his visit to Israel and the West Bank in July, when he gave his full-throated support to Tel Aviv as Washington's guard dog in the region, pledging billions in aid as well as protection for Israel at the UN and the International Criminal Court.

Lina Abu Akleh, Shireen's niece, said of Israel's investigation, "Our family is not surprised by this outcome since it's obvious to anyone that Israeli war criminals cannot investigate their own crimes..."

"We could never expect any type of accountability or legitimate investigation from the very entity responsible

for gunning down an unarmed and clearly identifiable journalist."

The family are demanding that the US government conduct its own investigation into the killing of Shireen, who held both Palestinian and American nationality, and will press for a full International Criminal Court investigation and trial.

On Monday, the US State Department supported the findings of the Israeli military on Shireen's murder, declaring with consummate cynicism "the importance of accountability in this case"

Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people are matched in their different ways by US imperialism's other allies in the region: the blood-soaked dictatorships of Egypt and the Gulf monarchs.

The absence of any critical response to Israel's cover-up highlights the fundamental role played by the corporate media as gatekeepers of the truth and a public relations service for the ruling class. If state crimes cannot be hushed up, they must be carefully stage-managed so as not to rock the boat, with ever more outlandish excuses for war crimes.

It was for breaking with the servile conventions of the mainstream media, revealing the war crimes committed by the US and the UK and exposing their media propagandists who launched the wars, that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is now imprisoned in Belmarsh maximum security prison facing life imprisonment or death in the US.

The killing and imprisonment of journalists in the line of duty signal that all restraints on state lawlessness will be removed as the imperialist powers prepare for direct military confrontation with Russia and China.



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