

Israel assassinates veteran Al Jazeera reporter in West Bank

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Israeli snipers shot and killed Shireen Abu Akleh, a 51-year-old Palestinian reporter for Al Jazeera Arabic, who was covering the raids by Israeli security forces in the West Bank city of Jenin.

For the past month, Israeli troops have been carrying out almost daily raids across the West Bank, occupied illegally by Israel since the 1967 Arab Israeli war. These came in the wake of several attacks that have killed 19 Israeli Jews since March 22, killing dozens of Palestinians and injuring hundreds.

Abu Akleh, a widely respected journalist who was also a US citizen, was one of *Al Jazeera's* first on-the-spot reporters, having worked for the network since 1997. She was wearing a press vest and a helmet when she was killed.

Israeli snipers also shot another journalist, Ali Samoudi, in the back. Speaking in his bed in hospital, Samoudi insisted that the Israeli security forces had deliberately targeted the journalists who were in an open area and would have been clearly visible. He said there was no firing at Israeli forces by Palestinians, nor could he see any Palestinian fighters or even civilians in the area. Samoudi explained, “We were going to film the Israeli army operation and suddenly they shot us without asking us to leave or stop filming.”

He added, “The first bullet hit me and the second bullet hit Shireen... there was no Palestinian military resistance at all at the scene. If there were, we wouldn't have been in that area.”

Another journalist, Shatha Hanaysha, positioned next to Abu Akleh, confirmed his statement, saying there had been no confrontations between Palestinian fighters and the Israeli army and that the journalists had been targeted. “We were four journalists, we were all wearing vests, all wearing helmets,” Hanaysha told *Al Jazeera*. “The [Israeli] occupation army did not stop firing even after she collapsed. I couldn't even extend my arm to pull her

because of the shots. The army was adamant on shooting to kill.”

Hours later Israeli police stormed Abu Akleh's home in East Jerusalem as her family and friends gathered to mourn her death. The police chief demanded a Palestinian flag was taken down and they end the gathering and singing.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett issued a statement denying responsibility for Abu Akleh's death and sought to pin responsibility for her death on the Palestinians, claiming, “It appears likely that armed Palestinians who were firing indiscriminately at the time—were responsible for the unfortunate death of the journalist.”

Both the government and the army released video clips purporting to show Palestinians aiming their fire at Israeli soldiers. The clips were so blatantly a fraud that the government was forced to retract its claims.

Al-Jazeera interrupted its broadcast to announce Abu Akleh's death, saying “In a tragic and deliberate crime that violates all international laws and norms, Israeli occupation forces assassinated in cold blood our correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh.” It called the killing a “heinous crime which intends to only prevent the media from conducting their duty.”

The network called on the international community to “condemn and hold the Israeli occupation forces accountable for deliberately targeting and killing our colleague” and added, “We pledge to prosecute the perpetrators legally, no matter how hard they try to cover up their crime and bring them to justice.”

Qatar, which funds Al Jazeera, condemned the killing “in the strongest terms,” calling it a “heinous crime,” a “flagrant violation of international humanitarian law” and a “blatant attack on media freedom.” The foreign ministry called for “urgent action to prevent occupation authorities from committing further violations of the freedom of

expression and to take all measures to stop violence against Palestinians and media workers.”

The US ambassador to Israel, Tom Nides, merely tweeted that he was “very sad” to learn of Abu Akleh’s death and called for a “thorough investigation.” The US Embassy in Jerusalem issued a statement saying that it was providing Ms. Abu Akleh’s family with consular assistance and that the protection of American citizens was a “top priority.”

These pro forma statements are rank hypocrisy. Nothing will be done. A cursory, if any, investigation will exonerate the security forces or administer a slap on the wrist. Washington has for decades allowed Israel, the custodian of US imperialism’s interests in the region, to commit one atrocity after another with impunity, vetoing dozens of UN resolutions condemning its activities.

The Obama, Trump and now the Biden administrations have for more than a decade sought to destroy Julian Assange, who has been languishing in London’s notorious Belmarsh Prison for three years while the US seeks his extradition from the UK for revealing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their efforts are likewise aimed at intimidating journalists and suppressing press freedom.

Abu Akleh’s assassination follows a long line of Israeli attacks on Palestinian journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists’ database, 24 journalists have been killed in Israel and the Palestinian territories since 1992. While 14 were caught in crossfire, others appear to have been deliberately targeted.

Reporters Without Borders say that at least 144 Palestinian journalists have been wounded by Israeli forces using live fire and rubber bullets, as well as stun grenades, teargas and beatings with batons across the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2018. Some of the most egregious incidents include:

* The attacks on journalists covering the Great March of Return’s weekly protests on Fridays during 2018-19, when Israeli security forces shot and killed two Palestinian journalists, Yaser Murtaja and Ahmad Abu Hussein, filming on the Gaza frontier in 2018. Hundreds if not thousands more were injured.

* In November 2018, Israeli fire injured AP reporter Rashed Rashid in the left ankle while he was covering a protest near the Gaza frontier, even though he was clearly identified as a journalist and was standing with a crowd of other journalists some 600 metres from the Israeli border when he was hit. The military never acknowledged the shooting.

* An Israeli air strike killed journalist Yousif Abu Hussein in his apartment in Gaza City during last May’s war on the besieged enclave. Abu Hussein was a popular broadcaster with Voice of Al-Aqsa radio.

Reporters Without Borders issued a statement in relation to the war saying that it “condemns Israel’s disproportionate use of force against journalists, who should under no circumstances be treated as parties to the armed conflict.”

Israel has long been critical of Al Jazeera’s coverage of its treatment of the Palestinians, in no small part because Qatar funds the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Hamas, the bourgeois clerical group that rules Gaza and has been gaining influence in the West Bank at the expense of the hated Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority. Last year, police briefly detained Givara Budeiri, another Al Jazeera reporter, during a protest in Jerusalem. She had to be treated for a broken hand after a roughing up by the police. During the 11-day bombardment of Gaza last year, an Israeli airstrike destroyed a multi-story building in Gaza City housing the Associated Press and Al Jazeera’s offices, which Israel claimed Hamas was using as a command centre.

Last month, international and Palestinian journalist groups filed a formal complaint with the International Criminal Court accusing Israel of war crimes against journalists, systematically targeting journalists working in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza and failing to carry out proper investigations of the killings of news reporters.

The ever-greater persecution of the Palestinians is a sharp expression of a broader turn towards authoritarianism, the suppression of democratic norms and militarism by Israel and governments around the world under the impact of class antagonisms at home and international conflicts abroad.

As Israel’s assassination of journalists and reporters shows, there is no constituency for the defence of democratic rights within the political establishment. While today, the Israeli state uses these methods against the Palestinians, it will have no hesitation in using the same methods against its own citizens, Arab and Jewish.



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