

Imperialist powers back Israel's assassination of Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh

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Ten-strong rows of Israeli security forces in full combat gear brutally attacked Palestinians mourning the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh, the widely respected *Al Jazeera* journalist, on Friday. They grabbed Palestinian flags from mourners as they tried to carry her coffin to Jerusalem's Old City and then to the Roman Catholic cemetery on Mount Zion.

The 51-year-old Palestinian-American reporter, clad in a press vest and helmet and standing in open view near a roundabout, had been covering constant raids by Israeli security forces in the West Bank city of Jenin, when she was targeted and shot by Israeli snipers Wednesday morning. Another journalist was hospitalised. After her death, police stormed her family's home demanding they take down the Palestinian flag and end the gathering and singing.

Such were the police beatings on the day of the funeral that the pall bearers 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 change plans and whisk her coffin away in a car as a police officer removed the Palestinian flags covering it.

Israel's assassination sparked outrage and sorrow, with thousands of Palestinians turning up to greet her coffin and help carry it through the West Bank cities of Jenin, Nablus and Ramallah. Despite restrictions preventing Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza entering East Jerusalem, mourners, Christian and Muslim, came from all over Israel, making this the biggest Palestinian funeral in decades, exceeding that of Yasser Arafat in Ramallah in 2004.

The Israeli authorities had tried to pin the blame for Abu Akleh's killing on the Palestinians, claiming she fell as they fired on Israeli soldiers and issuing a blatantly faked video clip of Palestinian fighters in a narrow alleyway as "proof". The US embassy, rejecting any responsibility to

investigate the death of an American citizen—Abu Akleh held dual Palestinian-US nationality—rushed to tweet the same clip.

After visiting the site of the clip, the human rights group B'Tselem said it was impossible for Abu Akleh to have been hit from there. On Friday, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) public prosecutor concluded after an autopsy and interviews with witnesses that Abu Akleh had been deliberately shot in the head by Israeli forces. In the face of the overwhelming evidence, Israel has had to retract its claim, admit that Israeli forces might have killed her and offer the PA a "joint investigation" into her killing. The PA is demanding an independent international investigation.

In a comment revealing Israel's determination to prevent its criminal actions in support of a decades-long illegal occupation seeing the light of day, military spokesman Ran Kochav said, "So this thing can happen." He described Abu Akleh as "filming and working for a media outlet amidst armed Palestinians. They're armed with cameras, if you'll permit me to say so."

The army has the full-throated support of fascist legislators such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Israel's far-right settler movement.

The murder of a journalist reporting on Israel's brutal repression of the Palestinians flows inexorably from the escalating class tensions within Israel/Palestine amid increasingly conflicted international relations throughout the world. For the last two months, Israeli troops have been carrying out almost daily raids across the occupied West Bank in pursuit of "terror suspects," killing at least 30 Palestinians and injuring hundreds. Jenin, where the venal PA has lost control, is the particular focus of attacks. This comes in the wake of a series of killings of 19 Israelis by desperate Palestinians with few known connections to each other or to armed groups.

The Palestinians' longstanding fury over the almost

daily killings—58 Palestinians have been killed so far this year—settler violence against their farms, homes and property, evictions, house demolitions and settlement expansion has been exacerbated by the deteriorating economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, particularly in the aftermath of US sanctions on Russia that have pushed up the cost of fuel, fertilisers and food.

Israel has the full support of the major imperialist powers that posture as defenders of democracy and basic democratic rights. What is at stake is the survival of all the autocratic regimes, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, along with Israel, on which imperialism depends in the resource-rich region.

While the United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned Abu Akleh's killing and called for "an immediate, thorough, transparent, and impartial investigation into her killing," the US used its influence to water down a resolution that omits any reference to Israel's violence at the funeral, and to block an international investigation.

Israel can rely on the western, corporate and state-controlled media to regurgitate its lying version of events. Even now, the media organisations that initially reported Israel's version of Abu Akleh's assassination are merely stating that the circumstances of her death are under investigation. So one-sided was the *New York Times* coverage of the assassination that Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a US-based group opposed to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, asked its members to write to the newspaper's editors to demand better coverage. Sonya E Meyerson-Knox, communications director of JVP, told *Middle East Eye* that instead of reporting the facts confirmed by other journalists, video clips and human rights groups, "the western media has simply parroted talking points from the Israeli military."

So egregious is Israel's record of attacking Palestinian journalists that on Sunday, the anniversary of the Nakba—as the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is known—when about 750,000 Palestinians fled or were forced to flee their homes, journalists held up 55 paper press jackets outside the BBC headquarters in central London, one for each of the journalists killed by Israel since 2000. This protest was part of the day's March for Palestine from the BBC to Downing Street, the Prime Minister's office in London, attended by 15,000 people.

The event followed the UK government's announcement on May 10 that it would introduce legislation banning local councils, universities and other

public bodies from participating in boycott and divestment campaigns aimed at ending international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians.

On Friday, a court in Berlin upheld a ban on all Palestinian "Nakba Day" demonstrations in the German capital over the weekend. Germany, a key supporter of Israel, has long remained silent over the government's brutal crackdown in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The court justified its ban on five Palestinian demonstrations by claiming they risked inflammatory or anti-Semitic chants, intimidation and violence. Palestinian organisers have insisted repeatedly that they do not condone anti-Semitism. The court also cited the "high degree of mobilisation" around Nakba Day as a relevant factor, a reference to the fact that last year more than 10,000 people attended a demonstration to mark Nakba Day and protest Israel's murderous bombardment of Gaza that started on May 10.

The ban also applied to a meeting planned for Friday evening by Jüdische Stimme, a Jewish group that supports Palestinian rights, centred on the assassination of Abu Akleh.

Last month, the German media reported that Jews had been subject to anti-Semitic insults at a pro-Palestine protest in Berlin. However, Jüdische Stimme's chairperson Wieland Hoban said that this was just a pretext to prevent Palestine solidarity, commenting, "The killing of Palestinian journalists is an attempt to kill information, to kill truth, which is exactly what the Berlin police are doing by suppressing demonstrations." The German authorities deployed more than 1,000 officers to enforce the ban on Palestine solidarity demonstrations, attacking, kettling and arresting demonstrators.



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