



[Rights and Social Justice Activists Criticize the U.S. State Department's Report on the Killing of Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh](#)

This week, the U.S. Department of State released an official statement regarding the murder of respected Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, vaguely expressing that she was “likely killed by Israeli military gunfire” but failing to draw a definitive conclusion about the origin of the bullet that struck her. Rights and social justice activists have criticized the State Department’s language, expressing disappointment that they have “muddied the water” and failed to have the moral courage to clearly implicate Israel for the crime. While a host of independent investigations by reputable organizations have all found that Abu Akleh was killed by Israeli forces, the U.S. State Department claimed that the bullet was too damaged to make clear conclusions. Israeli human rights group B’Tselem labeled the State Department’s remarks as “U.S.-backed Israeli whitewash” and pointed to the fact that all other examinations so far have found that Israel is responsible for the killing. Importantly as well, rights and social justice activists lamented how vague statements like this open the door for potential impunity and a lack of accountability.

The U.S. State Department’s positioning on the killing of Abu Akleh has disheartened rights advocates regarding the failure of the entity to call out Israel for its behavior – even when it commits crimes against journalists and United States citizens. Thus, rights groups and a significant number of lawmakers in Washington have continued to urge for a comprehensive and fair investigation into the killing. Recently, The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a United States watchdog, reiterated those calls and the need for accountability. In a statement, CPJ officials voiced that “The United States should either take the lead in investigating Abu Akleh’s death in a fully credible and transparent manner, or it should support international efforts to seek justice on behalf of her and her family.” The targeting of journalists is a crime under international law, and the deplorable actions of Israeli forces certainly warrant intense scrutiny and examination. Above all, activists sincerely hope that there will be repercussions for the crime, particularly as the official comments from the U.S. State Department seem to show a non-committal attitude towards the human rights violation and a desire to sweep the incident under the rug ahead of a visit by U.S. President Joe Biden to Israel and Palestine later this month.

The U.S Security Coordinator (USSC)’s investigation did not present official conclusions on the bullet’s origin, despite the fact that all of the other evidence points to the Israeli military. The USSC findings also claimed that there was no evidence for deliberate intention, but rather blamed a chaotic and messy combat scene with “tragic” results – despite the fact that all independent examinations to-date have ruled out the initial Israeli fabrication that crossfire during a clash with Palestinian militants may have resulted in the killing of Abu Akleh. Furthermore, the Israeli raid conducted at the time of Ms. Abu Akleh’s murder was itself a violation of international law, as it took place in the illegally-occupied West Bank. For Palestinians, Abu Akleh’s death highlights the dangers of living under illegal Israeli military occupation, and soldiers accused of heinous crimes are rarely held accountable.

Activists have tried to draw attention to how the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh is part of a troubling trend of growing and more blatant Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians. Due to this, accountability is of the utmost importance in order to deter continued abuses like this.