

Senate Dems Press Biden to Investigate Killing of Palestinian-American Journalist Ahead of Israel Trip

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Nearly half of the Senate’s Democratic caucus has called on President Joe Biden to conduct an independent probe into the murder of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, a US citizen who was shot dead by Israeli troops while reporting from the occupied West Bank last month.

A veteran Al Jazeera reporter, Abu Akleh was fatally shot in the head soon after arriving at a Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin on May 11, where Israeli forces were carrying out a raid. Though she and other journalists present were wearing vests and helmets indicating they were members of the press, they were fired upon regardless.

In a [letter](#) penned by 24 Democratic senators on Thursday, lawmakers argued there had been “no significant progress” toward launching an “independent, thorough and transparent investigation” in the month since the journalist’s death, adding that the United States must be “directly involved” in the probe given her American citizenship.

Today, 24 of us are calling upon [@POTUS](#) to ensure direct U.S. involvement in the investigation into the shooting death of American journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, so that all parties can have confidence in the findings and to ensure accountability. pic.twitter.com/HqwOFm4zg0

— Senator Chris Van Hollen (@ChrisVanHollen) [June 23, 2022](#)

The senators went on to raise concerns over press freedoms for journalists in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, citing an Israeli military spokesman who claimed Abu Akleh and her colleagues were “armed with cameras” on the day she was killed. Fellow Al Jazeera reporter Ali al-Samoudi was also shot and wounded during the incident, but survived.

“Journalists must be able to perform their jobs without fear of attack,” the letter continued.

“We believe that, as a leader in the effort to protect the freedom of the press and the safety of journalists, and given the fact that Ms. Abu Akleh was an American citizen, the US government has an obligation to ensure that a comprehensive, impartial and open investigation into her shooting death is conducted.”

Though Israel has not taken responsibility for the death and officials have suggested Palestinian militants may have fired the bullet that took the journalist’s life, reporting by several major news outlets indicates that Israeli forces likely killed Abu Akleh, including the [Washington Post](#), the [Associated Press](#), the [New York Times](#) and [CNN](#).

The letter from senators comes less than a month before Biden makes a trip to the Middle East, where he plans to stop in Israel, the West Bank and Saudi Arabia. The White House [claims](#) the visit is meant to cement ties between Tel Aviv and a number of new-found Arab allies.

Saudi Arabia, like Israel, has come under fire for tolerating or directly committing violence against journalists. According to the CIA, the country’s de facto ruler, crown prince Mohammad bin Salman, [ordered the assassination](#) of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. The gruesome murder was carried out by Saudi government agents at a diplomatic facility in Turkey, and led Biden – then a presidential candidate – to label Riyadh a “pariah” state. Since taking office, however, Biden has done little to change Washington’s warm relationship with the Saudi royal family, prompting [criticism](#) from rights groups demanding accountability for the repressive Gulf monarchy.

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Kyle Anzalone and Will Porter host Conflicts of Interest along with Connor Freeman.

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