

Documentary sheds light on Biden's reactions to Shireen Abu Akleh's killing



A probe into the U.S journalist's death in the West Bank suggests the U.S. had reason to believe her shooting was intentional.

Ramallah, May 9 (RHC)-- A documentary film has shed new light on how the administration of United States President Joe Biden responded to the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, suggesting Washington had evidence indicating her shooting death was likely intentional.

An Israeli sniper fatally shot Abu Akleh nearly three years ago while she reported from the Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on May 11, 2022.

The new film — a 40-minute investigative documentary from the Washington, DC-based media company Zeteo — was released on Thursday just ahead of the anniversary of her death.

Under the title *Who Killed Shireen?*, the documentary explores not only who pulled the trigger but why justice has been so elusive in Abu Akleh's case. It also offers the clearest picture yet of the Biden administration's political manoeuvring as public pressure mounted for accountability.

Abu Akleh was a U.S. citizen, and during her final reporting assignment, she wore both a helmet and a blue vest clearly labelled with the word "press" to indicate her status as a journalist.

In the aftermath of her killing, the Biden administration faced pressure to investigate the circumstances of her death and whether the shooting was intentional.

But while the administration initially called for an "independent, credible investigation", it shifted its stance as the months progressed. It walked back calls for the killer to be "prosecuted" and eventually described the shooting as "the result of tragic circumstances." It also eased its scrutiny of the Israeli military, calling for accountability only in the form of a review of its "rules of engagement".

The documentary *Who Killed Shireen?* features interviews from former Washington insiders about why the Biden administration made such a pivot. Its most damaging testimony comes from an anonymous official, who spoke with his face and voice obscured.

In the film, the official claims the evidence available to the Biden administration indicated that Abu Akleh's death "was an intentional killing". He said that assessment was based on the "visual capabilities of that day" and the distance between the Israeli snipers and the journalists who were shot.

Another journalist, Ali al-Samoudi, was also wounded at the same time as Abu Akleh, though he survived his gunshot. "Whether or not they knew it was her [Abu Akleh] or not can very well be debated, but they would have absolutely known it was a media person or a noncombatant at a minimum that [the Israeli soldier] shot and killed," the anonymous Biden official said. He added that it was his belief that the shooter would have been able to see Abu Akleh's blue "press" jacket.

The official acknowledged the shift in the Biden administration's position, from viewing the shooting as "an intentional killing" to describing it as "a tragic accident". He linked that about-face to the historically close ties the U.S. has shared with Israel.

"Ultimately, I think what it came down to was different pressure within the administration to not try to anger the government of Israel too much, by trying to force their hand at saying they intentionally killed a US citizen," the official said.

Another former U.S. official, Andrew Miller, also spoke to filmmakers as part of the documentary. Miller served as the deputy secretary of state for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs from 2022 to 2024, and he indicated that the Biden administration had not been forthcoming about the stonewalling it faced from the Israeli government. He said the government of then-Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett refused to allow the U.S. access to the soldier who fired the fatal shot, even for "informal" questioning.

Miller also cast doubt on Israeli claims that Abu Akleh was shot during a crossfire with Palestinian fighters. He explained that the Biden administration had information from the start that contradicted those claims.

"The fact that the official Israeli position remains that this was a case of crossfire ... [that] the entire episode was a mistake — as opposed to potentially a mistake in identification or the deliberate targeting of this individual — points to, I think, a broader policy of seeking to manage the narrative," Miller said.

The Biden administration had never publicly contradicted Israel's assessment. Instead, when the Israeli military released its final report on the killing in September 2022, it said it "welcomed" the assessment.

That report asserted that Abu Akleh was "accidentally hit" by an Israeli bullet "during an exchange of fire in which life-risking, widespread and indiscriminate shots were fired toward" Israeli soldiers.

To date, the U.S. government has never declassified a State Department report on the killing or confirmed media reports that the Department of Justice was conducting a separate probe.

Rights groups, press freedom organisations, and lawmakers have long called the Biden administration's response inadequate, appealing for greater transparency and for the US to withhold aid to the military unit responsible.

Advocates said the latest revelations underscore a continued cycle of impunity. "The U.S. government has acted as an accomplice to Israeli war crimes, not only against Palestinians but Americans, too, trumping loyalty to its own laws and citizens," said Raed Jarrar, advocacy director at the human rights organisation Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), in a statement responding to the documentary.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and NEWS AGENCIES]

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