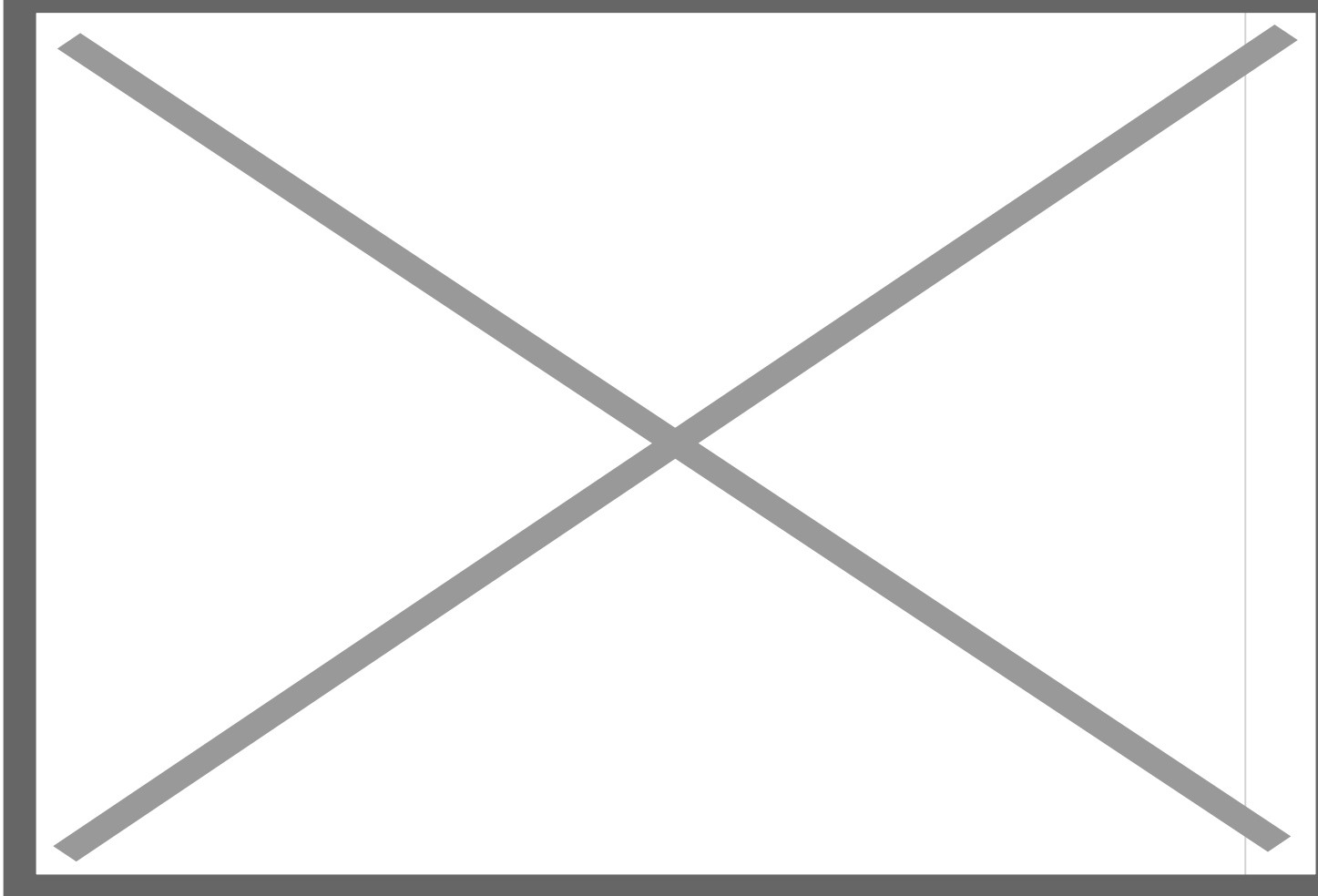


Reports say U.S. to open investigation into Shireen Abu Akleh killing

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The killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May has sparked international outrage and calls for justice [File: Abed Al Hashlamoun/EPA]

Washington, November 15 (RHC)-- The United States has informed Israeli authorities that it decided to open its own investigation into the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, several Israeli and

US media outlets reported, citing unidentified sources. According to a report by Axios on Monday, the U.S. Justice Department informed its counterpart in Israel that the FBI is opening a probe into the incident.

Abu Akleh was fatally shot by Israeli forces while covering a raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin in May. The Al Jazeera correspondent, who was 51, was a U.S. citizen and one of the best-known reporters on the conflict in the Arab World. The scope of a U.S. investigation, as well as what consequences could ensue, remain unclear. A U.S. Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment when contacted by Al Jazeera on Monday.

But Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said Israel would not cooperate with an external investigation into Abu Akleh's killing. "The decision taken by the U.S. Justice Department to conduct an investigation into the tragic passing of Shireen Abu Akleh, is a mistake," Gantz wrote on Twitter. "I have delivered a message to US representatives that we stand by the [Israeli army's] soldiers, that we will not cooperate with an external investigation, and will not enable intervention to internal investigations," he also tweeted.

The reports on Monday come less than two weeks after Israeli voters favoured a right-wing coalition that will bring former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu back to power. Bruce Fein, a constitutional lawyer and former Justice Department official, said a decision to launch an FBI investigation into Abu Akleh's killing means that the US authorities have "credible evidence" related to what occurred. "There's credible evidence in the FBI's view, based upon things that have been in the public domain — irrespective of Israel's recalcitrance — to believe that a crime was committed, namely assassination," Fein told Al Jazeera.

"And secondly, there's got to be some credible evidence — in my view — that an American citizen, could be a dual citizen, was the one who pulled the trigger." Fein said while Israel may be quick to refuse to cooperate with the probe, the US has many tools, including military aid and regional geopolitics, to pressure its Middle East ally. "Those kinds of levers can change the minds of the Israelis," he said.

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