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## Journalists, Israel and War Crimes



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Following the assassination of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the West Bank in May, the government of Israel attempt to muddy the waters around her death, saying that she could have been accidentally killed by Palestinian gunman. That fantasy was quickly dispatched, as several media outlets did a thorough investigation of the crime. For example, CNN, hardly a beacon of light for Palestinian rights, did a such an investigation, and their report reads, in part, as follows:

“But an investigation by CNN offers new evidence — including two videos of the scene of the shooting — that there was no active combat, nor any Palestinian militants, near Abu Akleh in the moments leading up to her death. Videos obtained by CNN, corroborated by

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testimony from eight eyewitnesses, an audio forensic analyst and an explosive weapons expert, suggest that Abu Akleh was shot dead in a targeted attack by Israeli forces.”

And CNN wasn't the only independent organization to investigate: “Witnesses, including Al Jazeera journalists, immediately said Israeli forces had carried out the shooting in Jenin, a claim that was backed up by numerous investigations by media outlets, human rights organisations, and the United Nations.”

It is increasingly difficult for the Israel government to shift blame away from its own soldiers. Ms. Abu Akheh, like the other journalists who accompanied her, was wearing a helmet and yellow vest that clearly indicated she was a member of the press. And journalists working in the West Bank take particular steps to attempt to assure their safety. Shatha Hanaysha, a colleague of Ms. Abu Akleh, interviewed after the assassination, said this: “We stood in front of the Israeli military vehicles for about five to ten minutes before we made moves to ensure they saw us. And this is a habit of ours as journalists, we move as a group and we stand in front of them so they know we are journalists, and then we start moving.”

As the Israeli narrative unraveled in the face of indisputable evidence, the government decided to take a different approach. According to The New York Times, “The Israeli Army has concluded that Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American broadcaster, was probably killed by one of its own soldiers — but stopped short of accepting definitive blame.” It is difficult to understand how a soldier could have ‘accidentally’ carefully targeted and killed a journalist whose clothing clearly marked her as such, but there you are. The Israeli government never takes responsibility for its war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The U.S., which supports all of Israel's crimes and is therefore complicit in them, timidly suggested that the Israeli position was insufficient. As evidence of the hesitancy of the U.S. to deal effectively with Israel, ABC News reported this: “The State Department has said it will press Israel to review its policies after the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May. The U.S. and Israel have separately concluded she was likely *shot by an Israeli soldier by mistake during a gun-battle with Palestinians, despite video footage showing there were no militants or clashes in her immediate vicinity at the time.*” (Emphasis added).

So, the U.S. says it was all an accident, that the Israeli soldiers felt mortal danger from Palestinian ‘militants’ who were nowhere to be seen or heard, and then ‘accidentally’ shot a journalist clearly marked as a member of the press.

For current, interim Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who will seek his first term in November, having only been appointed when the most recent government collapsed, there was no reason to listen to the empty ramblings of the U.S. government: Israel will do as it pleases and still get \$4 billion in aid from the U.S. annually; that aid has no strings attached. Said he: “I will not allow an IDF soldier that was protecting himself from terrorist fire to be prosecuted just to receive applause from abroad.”

That short statement is worth a bit of analysis. We will explore it point-by-point:

*‘...protecting himself from terrorist fire’.*

There is so much in these five words! First, as has been shown, there was no ‘fire’; the IDF soldiers, according to eye-witnesses and video of the scene, were in no danger whatsoever. Immediately after the assassination of Ms. Abu Akleh, Israel released videos of gunfire, but a quick look by experts proved that those scenes were in an entirely different area of the city.

And what of the term ‘terrorist’ in this statement? Israel occupies the West Bank, and according to international law, an occupied people has the right to resist the occupation in any way possible, including armed struggle. The difference between ‘terrorist’ and ‘freedom fighter’ is in the eye of the beholder with, in this case, the apartheid occupier seeing its victims as ‘terrorists’, but the people of Palestine, and their advocates around the world, seeing them as freedom fighters.

*‘...to be prosecuted just to receive applause from abroad.’*

No, the soldier guilty of this crime should not be prosecuted to receive applause from abroad. He or she should be prosecuted because he/she committed a war crime, and no one should be above the law. Of course, thanks mainly to the United States, Israel and its terrorist forces are above the law.

One looks in vain for the international outcry in response to this assassination. There was, throughout the Middle East, a strong response, due at least in part to the personal popularity of Ms. Abu Akleh, but that as faded. After all, several Arab states have normalized relations with Israel, and that normalization comes with pressure from the U.S. to allow Israel carte blanche on the world stage: decades long occupation, annexation of lands, genocidal bombing campaigns, apartheid policies, terrorism, arrests of men, women and children and holding them for months or years without charge; Israel is guilty of all these crimes, and the world allows it.

During one of those genocidal bombing campaigns, in May of 2021, Israel received a rude awakening: around the world, people took to the streets to protest this abomination. In the

West Bank, in a rare show of unity, Palestinians closed their shops and went on strike. World government leaders had little to say, but the people spoke, and the bombing stopped after a short although deadly time.

People around the world who support human rights and international law must act, as they did then. They must march, protest, write and vote to support the human rights struggles of the Palestinian people, and to hold Israel to account for its many war crimes and crimes against humanity. Too many governments are beholden to the corrupt but powerful. U.S. government, and that will not change until the people demand it. They must do so, sooner rather than later.

*Robert Fantina's latest book is Propaganda, Lies and False Flags: How the U.S. Justifies its Wars.*

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