

From the Editors

“WE MAY DIE BUT PALESTINE WILL BE FREE.” This was the chant that echoed through the streets of Jerusalem as thousands of Palestinians across class, gender, sectarian, and political divides carried Shireen Abu Akleh to her final resting place. A woman whose resolve and commitment had shaped a quarter of a century of relentless reporting, Abu Akleh was killed by the Israeli army in the early hours of May 11, 2022. An Israeli sniper hit Abu Akleh just below her ear, just under the helmet labeled PRESS, just above the flak jacket embossed with the letters PRESS. She was in Jenin, the place that had inspired her long and formidable career covering Palestine. And in that instant a light was extinguished, propelling Palestinians and Arabs at home and in the diaspora into an intense and pulsing grief.

Israel’s massive *hasbara* machine went into immediate action, initially releasing a video of purported Palestinian gunmen who, they claimed, had killed the veteran reporter. In short order, eyewitnesses and other journalists refuted this propaganda, while the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem used GPS coordinates to show that the alleged site of the killing featured in the video was hundreds of meters away from where Abu Akleh was shot. The Israeli army then backtracked, suggesting that the sniper’s shot may have been in error, and soon the usual cycle of Israeli pronouncements about an investigation of its soldiers’ conduct began. As the world knows, Israeli investigations invariably fail to produce convictions or to punish Israeli soldiers, police, and settlers who murder unarmed Palestinians on a routine basis. Shortly thereafter, CNN produced a report based on a wealth of new evidence confirming that an Israeli sniper deliberately killed Abu Akleh in a “targeted attack.”¹

As international fury over the images of Abu Akleh’s killing swelled, the pathetic, mealy-mouthed hypocrisy of Empire was on full view in Washington. It mattered little to the Democratic establishment that Abu Akleh was a citizen of the “home of the free and the land of the brave.” The US Department of State, for its part, issued a hollow call for Israel to “investigate” itself. While Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) held her ground on the floor of the Congress, forcing a moment of silence, the US government’s willful complicity was blatant, furthering the perpetual impunity that facilitates Israel’s targeting of Palestinians, both in life and death.

That targeting of Palestinian death was on full display during Shireen’s funeral on the afternoon of May 13. The Israeli establishment had not accounted for the unity of ranks that Abu Akleh’s murder would galvanize. It did not foresee the outrage sparked by the killing of this humble, kind woman whose fortitude and professionalism were unmatched. Nor did it understand that Abu Akleh had been a school for generations of Palestinians and Arabs, teaching them about the daily realities of occupation and colonialism, from her early days as an Al Jazeera correspondent in 1997 to the most recent Unity Uprising of 2021. She modeled an unflinching commitment to telling the stories of a besieged and dispossessed people who, despite their statelessness, can cause a power much stronger than themselves to be filled with dread and to experience fear—colonial fear.

The occupier’s ignorance of how universally beloved the woman, who had been a presence in every Palestinian home for a quarter century, helps explain the brutality of armored Israeli

police beating pallbearers, ripping down the Palestinian flag, and nearly toppling Abu Akleh's coffin. At the most basic level, this was classical colonial policing, relying on the "moral effect" of brute force on the "uncivilized" and ignoring the unquenchable spirit of resistance of a people to the colonial yoke.² It came from the same playbook as the attacks perpetrated by so-called security forces on the funeral cortèges of the very people these forces had murdered in apartheid South Africa and Northern Ireland.

Whatever the armored Jerusalem police and their superiors intended, the throbbing streets just outside Damascus Gate told another story: the story of a tipping point suspended between the Israeli flag on one side and the torn but still fluttering Palestinian flag on the other. It was as if the murder of the beloved journalist had, in the words of Ghassan Abu Sitta, excised the last poisonous remnants of the Oslo process from the Palestinian body.³ As a headline in *Le Monde* put it, "During Shireen Abu Akleh's Funeral, the City of Jerusalem Affirms It Is Palestinian."⁴ Instructed to enforce Israel's "sovereignty over Jerusalem," Israeli police have unwittingly shown that Jerusalem is today as Palestinian and Arab as it has ever been.

As students of history know, there is never one moment when everything changes. Transformation is cumulative. Any casual observer of the last two years witnessing the struggle to defend land from Sheikh Jarrah to the hills of Hebron and to the Naqab can trace a slow but unmistakable shift in Palestine. The "two-state solution," and its sponsors, whether the United States and Israel or Arab regime normalizers, is but a commitment to the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinian people. We see this dispossession every day, in all corners of the brutalized and wounded land. From the village of al-Markaz in Masafer Yatta, the largest single ethnic cleansing episode since 1967, to the squares of Israeli universities where Palestinians are demanding freedom, we witness how the simple colors of a flag can inspire unbridled colonial fear and promises of "another" Nakba.⁵ But we know that the Nakba is ongoing, just as Palestinian resistance to it will continue to be.

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Endnotes

1. Zeena Saifi et al., "'They Were Shooting Directly at the Journalists': New Evidence Suggests Shireen Abu Akleh Was Killed in Targeted Attack by Israeli Forces," CNN, May 26, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/24/middleeast/shireen-abu-akleh-jenin-killing-investigation-cmd-intl/index.html>.
2. These are the words of a particularly callous British colonial officer, Maj. Gen. Charles Callwell, cited in Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2022), 103–4.
3. Conversation with Sherene Seikaly, May 12, 2022.
4. Louis Imbert, "Le temps des funérailles de Shireen Abu Akleh, la ville de Jérusalem s'affirme palestinienne," *Le Monde*, May 14, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/05/14/le-temps-des-funerailles-de-shirin-abou-akleh-jerusalem-s-affirme-palestinienne_6126041_3210.html.
5. Jonathan Ofir, "Israeli Lawmaker Warns Palestinians of Another 'Nakba' if They Fly Palestinian Flag," *Mondoweiss*, May 24, 2022, <https://mondoweiss.net/2022/05/israeli-lawmaker-warns-palestinians-of-another-nakba-if-they-fly-palestinian-flag/>.