

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 12, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write as elected officials who share your commitment to the need to protect journalists and freedom of the press wherever they operate around the world. For that reason, we welcomed your statement on June 8 when, in response to a question regarding the shooting death of American citizen and journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, you said “we are looking for an independent, credible investigation. When that investigation happens, we will follow the facts, wherever they lead. It’s as straightforward as that.” As you are aware, twenty-four senators and fifty-seven members of the House of Representatives called for an “independent investigation under U.S. auspices” in order to ensure that all parties have confidence in the findings and provide transparency and accountability for her killing.

While we were glad to see the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) involved in an independent forensic analysis of the bullet that killed Ms. Abu Akleh, that hardly constitutes an independent investigation into the overall circumstances of her killing. On July 5, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price indicated that, other than visiting the site of the shooting, the USSC did not conduct any further independent investigation. Instead, the USSC only reviewed the findings reached by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) “in their own respective investigations” and then Mr. Price shared the USSC’s assessment of those findings in a public statement of less than two hundred words. This does not meet any plausible definition of the “independent” investigation that you and members of Congress have called for. Nor does it provide the transparency that this case demands. Therefore, we write to seek further information regarding how the Administration plans to ensure that an independent, thorough, and transparent investigation is conducted into the shooting death of this American citizen and journalist.

In the interests of transparency and public confidence in the process, we respectfully request that you provide us with the work product and complete analysis compiled by the USSC in reaching its conclusions, and responses to the following questions:

1. Did the FBI or any other U.S. agencies participate in any way in the review by the USSC? If so, what was the extent and nature of their involvement?

2. Did the USSC conduct any interviews of witnesses? If so, who was interviewed, on what date, and what information was obtained?
3. What images and audio/video recordings, if any, did the USSC review, and what were the sources of such material?
4. Other than the forensics experts who examined the bullet that killed Ms. Abu Akleh, did the USSC consult with any other experts who could have been helpful in determining who killed Ms. Abu Akleh? If so, who was consulted and what information did they provide?
5. Multiple bullets were fired in the vicinity of the killing of Ms. Abu Akleh, including one that hit and wounded one of her colleagues. Other than the bullet that killed Ms. Abu Akleh, were any of the other bullets fired in the vicinity of Ms. Abu Akleh recovered? If so, were they examined by a forensics expert? If these other bullets have been recovered, who currently has custody over them?
6. Other than reviewing the investigations conducted by the IDF and the PA, did the USSC review any of the evidence collected from other investigations, including ones conducted by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN*, the *Associated Press*, or the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights? If so, which of these other investigations did the USSC review and what conclusions did the USSC reach with respect to these investigations?
7. Lt. Gen. Michael Fenzel and other members of the USSC visited the site of the shooting death of Ms. Abu Akleh. Did they make any finding or reach any conclusions based on that site visit? If so, what were those findings and/or conclusions?
8. Which specific evidence led to the USSC's conclusion that "gunfire from IDF positions was likely responsible for the death of Shireen Abu Akleh?"
9. Which specific evidence led to the USSC's conclusion "that there is no reason to believe that this was intentional but rather the result of tragic circumstances?"
10. Did the USSC make any significant findings or reach any significant conclusions that are not included in the summary statement that was released on July 4? If so, what were those findings and/or conclusions?
11. According to an AP article dated May 19, 2022, "the Israeli military has identified a soldier's rifle that may have killed Abu Akleh, but said it cannot be certain unless the Palestinians turn over the bullet for analysis." Did the USSC find that the IDF had identified the rifle that may have killed Ms. Abu Akleh? If so, did the USSC determine whether the IDF had questioned the soldier who had that rifle? And if the soldier was interviewed by the IDF, did the USSC obtain a transcript of that interview? Did the USSC, FBI, or any other U.S. agencies request to interview the soldier?

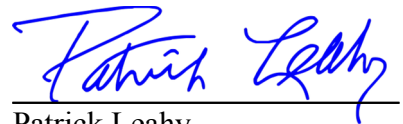
12. What steps will you take to ensure the “independent, credible” investigation you called for?
  
13. In his July 5 press briefing, Mr. Price stated, “we would want to see accountability in any case of a wrongful death. That would especially – and is especially the case in the wrongful death of an American citizen, as was Shireen Abu Akleh.” He went on to say, “we believe there needs to be accountability to see to it that something like this does not happen again.” What steps do you plan to take to ensure such accountability?

Please provide the requested materials and responses to these questions within two weeks.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator