

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 12, 2026

Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Kash Patel  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Secretary Rubio and Director Patel:

We write regarding the pursuit of transparency and accountability for the shooting death of American citizen and respected journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh. It has now been four years since Ms. Abu Akleh was shot and killed by Israeli Defense Forces while she was reporting in the West Bank. There was reportedly deep disagreement over the Biden Administration's public conclusions about the intentionality of the shooting from among the U.S. officials who closely examined the case. This reporting further underscores the need to release the summation report on the shooting death of Shireen Abu Akleh produced by the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC) in 2023. Additionally, we request a fulsome update from the FBI regarding their investigation into Ms. Abu Akleh's killing.

As the *New York Times* outlined in October 2025, several U.S. officials in the USSC office believed that the Israeli soldier who shot Ms. Abu Akleh must have been aware he was targeting a journalist "based on the circumstances of the shooting and the available evidence." In particular, Col. Steve Gabavics – a career military policeman who was serving as chief of staff to Lt. Gen. Michael Fenzel in the USSC office at the time of Ms. Abu Akleh's shooting – was "flabbergasted" that the July 4, 2022, State Department statement attributed the shooting to "tragic circumstances" and he believes that the U.S. government soft-pedaled the USSC's findings to appease the Israeli government.

The Biden Administration had tasked the USSC office with examining the case of Ms. Abu Akleh's shooting and writing a report on the evidence. Colonel Gabavics described himself as the lead U.S. investigator on the case and said he assessed the shooting was intentional due to several factors, including records of Israeli military radio traffic, visibility on that day, and the precision of the shots. Colonel Gabavics reportedly wrote these findings and strong language into a draft of the USSC report on the shooting, but General Fenzel disagreed with the assessment of intentionality and repeatedly softened the report language. According to the *New York Times*, this back-and-forth culminated in Gen. Fenzel ordering Col. Gabavics off the case and threatening his dismissal.

Ultimately, the final USSC summation report that was selectively shared with some members of Congress did not shed light on the state of mind of the individual responsible for firing the fatal

shot, mainly because the Israeli government did not grant the USSC access to key witnesses. Nevertheless, the report does provide very important insights into the circumstances that led to Ms. Abu Akleh's wrongful death, including relevant information and findings about the conduct of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) unit involved in that operation – as well as other IDF units operating in the West Bank. Following Ms. Abu Akleh's death, Secretary Blinken asked the Israeli government to review the IDF rules of engagement in the West Bank, but he was rebuffed. Such a review remains necessary today to protect innocent civilians, including American citizens, in the West Bank. In addition, we urge the Administration to release the USSC summation report to the public to help ensure transparency and accountability in the shooting death of Ms. Abu Akleh.

In November 2022, the FBI reportedly opened its own investigation into the shooting death of Abu Akleh. And yet, to date, the FBI has not released any findings, nor has it shared an expectation that it may do so in the future. Last year, the FBI was supposed to provide a briefing for relevant Senate Appropriations Committee staff on the status of the Shireen Abu Akleh case. However, the FBI officials who conducted the briefing were not familiar with Abu Akleh's case and only spoke at a high level about the FBI's abilities and constraints in these types of cases. On May 7, 2026, the Committee to Protect Journalists urged the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation to provide a public update on the status of the investigation and reasons for delay, and to commit to a timeline for the FBI to complete a thorough, impartial, and independent criminal investigation and to publicly release its findings. Given the enormous public interest at stake in Abu Akleh's case, as well as its implications for subsequent cases of violence against American citizens in the West Bank, it is long past time for the FBI to provide an update to Congress on its investigation into the shooting death of Shireen Abu Akleh.

Since Abu Akleh's death in May 2022, there have been at least seven additional American citizens killed in the West Bank. The killings of these Americans in the West Bank have been met by a lack of accountability from the Netanyahu government and an inability to secure justice by the U.S. government. The public release of the USSC summation report on Abu Akleh's killing, as well as an update on the FBI's investigation, are critical to ensuring transparency and accountability in Abu Akleh's case, and also to avoid future preventable and wrongful deaths – goals we should all support.

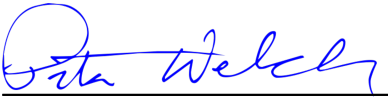
Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Peter Welch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke.

Peter Welch  
United States Senator