

Bassam Hassan, a top general under Assad, reportedly gave news regarding American who went missing in 2012



📷 Debra and Marc Tice, parents of Austin Tice, a freelance journalist who was kidnapped while reporting in Syria on 14 August 2012, say they have credible evidence he is alive. Photograph: Ali Smith/Photograph by Ali Smith

A high-ranking Syrian general under former president Bashar al-Assad who is now in Lebanon has reportedly told US investigators that the American journalist Austin Tice, who disappeared in 2012, is dead.

Bassam Hassan was a top security adviser once accused of facilitating chemical attacks on civilians. In a recent meeting with the FBI and CIA, he claimed that Assad - who was ousted in December and has since fled to Moscow - ordered Tice's execution, according to the New York Times and the BBC, which first reported the allegation. Each media organization cited sources familiar with the matter. Hassan's claims remain unverified.

Tice, a former marine who had done freelance journalism for the Washington Post and CBS, among other outlets, was abducted at a Damascus checkpoint in August 2012 when he was 31 years old. He briefly escaped but was recaptured and reportedly held in a detention center under Hassan's control.

US officials have long suspected Hassan's involvement in Tice's imprisonment. Hassan is also seen as a valuable source on other US intelligence interests, including Syria's chemical weapons program and Iranian activity in the region.

Over the years conflicting reports have surfaced regarding whether Tice is still alive. In response to Hassan's account, the Tice family issued a statement to the [New York Times](#), saying they were disappointed it had been published and doubted it was true.

Hassan was [sanctioned by the US](#) in 2014 for arms procurement and is wanted by French judges for allegedly helping coordinate sarin gas attacks in 2013. He reportedly maintained close ties with Iran's Revolutionary Guards in Syria.

In December 2024, after rebel forces seized Damascus, Hassan fled to Iran with Iranian assistance. He later traveled voluntarily to Lebanon. Since April, US investigators have interviewed Hassan multiple times, though the extent of his cooperation remains unclear.

Tice's whereabouts had long been a subject of mystery. After his abduction footage was released showing him blindfolded and surrounded by armed, masked men, but US officials believed it was staged in an attempt to frame militants for the kidnapping. Diplomatic efforts and a CIA-led taskforce tried unsuccessfully to find him, even offering rewards. But the fall of Assad's regime had raised hopes of resolving the case and Syria's new president, Ahmed al-Shara, has pledged to assist the search.

Earlier this month, [BBC News](#) obtained intelligence files reportedly confirming Tice had been imprisoned in Damascus. In a rare admission, the former Syrian general Safwan Bahloul said he personally interrogated Tice, marking the first time a Syrian official has acknowledged direct contact.

Debra Tice, his mother, told [the Guardian](#) in January that the family was not giving up hope in the search for her son.

"Austin, if you can somehow hear this, I love you. I know you're not giving up and neither am I," she said.