

Secret files confirm missing US Journalist Austin Tice was held by Assad regime



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LONDON – Newly uncovered Syrian intelligence files confirm for the first time that missing American journalist Austin Tice was imprisoned by the regime of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, contradicting years of official denials.

The BBC obtained the documents during a year-long investigation, corroborated by former Syrian officials. The files labelled “Austin Tice” and marked “top secret” show that Tice was held in a

Damascus detention center by Assad-loyalist paramilitary forces shortly after his disappearance in August 2012.

Tice, a former U.S. Marine and Georgetown law student, was abducted while reporting near Damascus. Weeks later, a video showed him blindfolded, raising suspicions of a staged jihadist kidnapping. Analysts and U.S. officials always suspected regime involvement, though Assad's government denied it.

The documents and eyewitness testimony indicate that Tice was initially held in Tahouneh prison. He reportedly suffered a viral illness during captivity but was treated. One former detainee who saw him recalled: "He looked sad the joy had left his face."

Sources also confirmed that Tice attempted a brief escape and was interrogated at least twice. A former National Defence Forces (NDF) member said he was seen as a high-value asset in future US-Syria negotiations.

Following Assad's fall in December 2024, hopes were renewed when President Joe Biden said he believed Tice was still alive. His mother, Debra Tice, said a credible source confirmed he was being "treated well."

However, when prisons were emptied after the regime's collapse, Tice was not found. His fate remains unknown.

Tice's family and US officials have been made aware of the intelligence files. He remains one of the longest-held American hostages in history.