

Malaysian PM: Missing plane crashed in southern Indian Ocean

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Prime Minister Najib Razak announced yesterday that Malaysia Airlines flight 370, which went missing on March 8, had crashed in the southern Indian Ocean, in “a remote location far from any possible landing sites.”

Malaysia Airlines earlier told family members of the 227 passengers and 12 crew that “we have to assume beyond any reasonable doubt that MH370 has been lost and that none of those on board survived.”

Relatives gathered at hotels in Kuala Lumpur and Beijing reacted with anger and distress. Reuters reported at least four people had to be carried out of the Lido Hotel in Beijing on stretchers. According to Australian ABC News, “About 50 police officers arrived and at least one scuffle broke out.”

Some Chinese families issued a statement saying that the Malaysian government and military and Malaysia Airlines had “misguided and delayed rescue actions, wasting a large quantity of human resources and materials and lost valuable time for the rescue effort.” They vowed to “take every possible means to pursue the unforgivable crimes and responsibility of all three.”

China’s deputy foreign minister Xie Hangsheng released a statement demanding that Malaysia “state the detailed evidence that leads them to this judgment, as well as supply all the relevant information and evidence about the satellite data analysis.”

No wreckage from the plane has yet been found. Razak said he was briefed by the UK Air Accidents Investigation Branch, which analysed data from British satellite firm Inmarsat and concluded that the plane’s last known location was in the middle of the Indian Ocean, southwest of Australia. Inmarsat said it ruled out a previous possibility that the plane flew north over central Asia.

Satellite images from France and China released over the past two days appear to corroborate an image from

a US satellite released on Thursday, showing unidentified objects floating in the remote area. Yesterday Chinese and Australian search planes spotted possible debris, which has not yet been recovered or identified. About 10 military aircraft from China, the US, Australia, Japan and New Zealand are participating in the search, as well as ships from Australia, Britain and China. Today’s search was suspended due to bad weather.

What happened to MH370, which was en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, is still extremely unclear, and may never be known if the plane’s black box is not recovered.

Investigators in Malaysia say the plane lost contact with air traffic controllers when its civilian transponder was disabled somewhere over the South China Sea. One week into the search, Malaysian authorities revealed that military radar had detected the plane veering west across the Malaysian peninsula. Investigators stated that someone with knowledge of the aircraft’s systems must have deliberately diverted it, but even that conclusion is not certain.

According to Inmarsat’s initial data, which was only made public by Malaysian authorities on March 15, the plane continued to travel for seven hours before possibly crashing into the Indian Ocean. According to the official accounts, no country was tracking the plane this entire time.

The Australian government, which is organising the current search efforts, said the US satellite image taken on March 16 (but only released four days later), showing possible wreckage, came from the private firm, DigitalGlobe.

This official version should be treated with scepticism. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on Sunday that US and British intelligence agencies

“provided key information” leading searchers to focus on the southern Indian Ocean, “according to Australia’s military and others familiar with the matter.” The report did not specify what information the agencies had provided.

Governments in the Asia-Pacific region are extremely reluctant to share data that could reveal their military and intelligence capabilities. The entire region is heavily militarised as a result of Washington’s “pivot to Asia,” which seeks China’s diplomatic and military encirclement, and involves preparations for war against China.

Malaysian Defence Minister Hishamuddin Hussein, who is the country’s acting transport minister and in charge of its search effort, said last week that the US had “possibly the best ability” to locate the missing plane, and urged it to release any relevant information.

The top secret US spy base at Pine Gap, in central Australia, reportedly has the capacity to detect radio and phone signals as far away as North Korea. It is used by the US to select targets for drone assassinations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to gather vast amounts of data from ordinary people, as part of the US National Security Agency’s mass spying programs.

Australia’s Jindalee Operational Radar Network also has a very powerful range, covering about 37,000 square kilometres. According to Australian media reports, the radar was probably focused on the north of the country as part of the government’s military operation to intercept refugee boats from Indonesia.

Even if these facilities and others—such as India’s military installations on the Nicobar and Andaman islands—did not detect MH370, this only raises the further question: if the bases were used for civilian purposes, instead of various secret military and intelligence operations, could they have spotted the plane before it crashed?

While claiming that the plane was deliberately diverted, Malaysian authorities and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation—which is involved in the investigation of the plane’s crew—have released no information to suggest who was responsible and why. Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar told a news conference yesterday that the police have not ruled out sabotage, hijacking, personal problems or psychological issues, but claimed there were no leads.

Authorities from Malaysia, China and other countries

that had passengers on the plane say background checks have turned up no links to terrorist groups. This information also remains unverified.



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