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Findings and Non-Findings: Malaysia's MH370 Report. The Mysterious Disappearance of Boeing 777 en Route to Beijing

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It does little to allay the grief of relatives and friends, but the MH370 report on the doomed, and ever spectral Malaysian passenger liner merely added smidgens of further speculation. The report from Malaysian authorities into the disappearance of the Boeing 777 on route to Beijing from Kuala Lumpur on March 8, 2014 will do little to contain the fever that accompanies such stories of disappearance, with MH370's vanishing deemed by The Washington Post "the biggest airplane mystery since the disappearance of Amelia Earhart."

The Post has a point, and Earhart's vanishing, along with navigator Fred Noonan over the Pacific in July 1937 during an attempt to circumnavigate the globe did prompt a costly effort to rival that of the fruitless search for MH370: a sixteen day, Presidentially mandated scouring of an area the size of Texas comprising nine vessels, four thousand crewmen, sixty-six aircraft and a bill of $4 million.

Kok Soo Chon, head of the MH370 safety investigation team, told a news conference on Monday that his team was "unable to determine the real cause for disappearance of MH370." Such an answer would only be possible "if the wreckage is found". Nor could his team "determine with any certainty the reasons that the aircraft diverted from its filed flight plan route."

The chief investigator did dangle a few theories: there might have been interference from any one of the 237 people on the plane with the pilots. "We cannot establish if there was third partly involvement but we also cannot exclude unlawful third party interference."

As for the pilots themselves: "We examined the pilot, the flight officer. We are quite satisfied with their background, with their training, with their mental health, mental state. We are not of the opinion that it could have been an event committed by the pilot."

That said, there was an undeniable fact: "that there was an air turnback. We cannot deny the fact that, as we have analysed, the systems were manually turned off with intent or otherwise." Tantalisingly, the motives are left to be pondered over, built upon and inflated.

Agency, in short, is everything; and speculation about how that agency manifested itself has been frenetic and rife. Pilots Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah and co-pilot Fariq Abdul Hamid have furnished investigators and conspiracy theorists over the years ample, if somewhat indigestible fodder. The MH370 investigation team preferred a different diet of solids. The rest have been left to fill in the blanks.

The captain had certainly done his bit to excite various opinions, with Malaysian police documents suggesting that he had been practising a "suicide route" on his home flight simulator. But as ever, the police were simply patching together scenarios rather than accepting them. *The Australian* was more brazen: Zaharie had hijacked the plane, locked the co-pilot out, depressurised the plane only to then re-pressurize it before landing gracefully upon the waters of the southern Indian Ocean then sinking it.

Such pictures of horrifying finality are always sealed by theories of the mandatory cover-up. In Earhart's case, one catchy, and very elastic version, is that US Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal felt disposed to conceal the destruction of Earhart's Lockheed Electra 10E at Aslito Field on Saipan in 1944. The aeronautical beast, so goes this theory, survived its occupants. Destroying the beast would destroy speculation.

Forrestal's diaries remain silent on the issue, but this did not discourage the idea that Japanese forces might have been responsible for doing away with the two flyers in an act of blood lust. This, suggest Thomas E. Devine and Richard M. Daley in *The Amelia Earhart Incident*, could well have been a pre-war Japanese atrocity against Earhart and Noonan, who "conceivably flew hundreds of miles off course and might well have observed forbidden military preparations in the Japanese Mandates." Forrestal, being savvy to a post-war order where Japanese assistance would be needed to counter the communist menace, kept mum on the whole affair.

Those working for the Australian Transport Safety Bureau have been irritated with the cover-up narrative regarding MH370, breaking their silence this year. "There's no earthly reason," claimed an agitated Peter Foley, "why someone in control of an aircraft would exhaust its fuel and then attempt to glide it when they have the option of ditching."

The authorities, however, have not covered themselves in professional, well-regarded glory. The Ministry of Transport did not see fit to have representatives to answer questions from family members. The report is also silent on the foot-dragging. It took hours before any interest was taken in pursuing the flight. When a search did commence, eight days were wasted in a mistaken spot. Then came 1,605 days of waiting for an unsatisfactory 449 page report.

Left with such questions, those seeking answers have filled the void of grief with legal actions and repeated promptings for clarification. Voice 370, a group claiming to represent the victims' relatives, is keen to identify "any possible falsification or elimination of records related to MH370 and its maintenance." The legend, agonisingly unresolved, will only proliferate in form and versions, aided by Kok's own observation this was not "the final report. It would be presumptuous of us to say it is."

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