

China's Pattern of Deception about MH370, by Victor Iannello, ScD, May 18, 2016

The timeline of actions and statements made by China in the aftermath of the disappearance of MH370 suggests a consistent pattern of deception. In particular, the pattern of behavior suggests that:

- Between March 8 and March 16, 2014, China produced false evidence suggesting that MH370 crashed into the South China Sea (SCS), including a false satellite image, a false diplomatic message, and a false seismic analysis. In parallel, China allegedly spied on Malaysian officials involved with the search through a well-planned attack into their computers.
- Between March 16 and March 24, 2014, China deliberately incited the Chinese next-of-kin (NOK) to not accept the official story from Malaysia by highlighting the discrepancies in the Malaysian narrative. China also demanded that the raw satellite be turned over so that China could perform an independent assessment.
- Starting on March 22, 2014, China began producing false evidence suggesting that MH370 crashed in the Southern Indian Ocean (SIO). First, it released a satellite image showing debris at 45S latitude. Two days later, it released images showing debris taken from an IL-76 search plane in the same area. Finally, on April 5, it claims that its patrol vessel heard acoustic pings from a black box. All of this evidence was later shown to be false.
- China refused to contribute money towards to the subsea search in the SIO for the wreckage even after the flaperon was found in July 2015. However, in August 2015, China stated that it believes the flaperon confirmed a crash in the SIO. In November 2015, it announced it would contribute \$14.5 million towards the subsea search. In January 2016, it was announced that a Chinese vessel will join the search.

It is possible that some of the confusing statements and actions from Malaysia in the days after the disappearance was due to pressure it was receiving from both the US and China. China was putting pressure on Malaysia to search the SCS while the US was promoting the idea that the plane crashed in the SIO. It was not until the White House stated that a search would be opened in the Indian Ocean that Malaysia abandoned the SCS narrative.

What follows are more details regarding this timeline of events:

The Disappearance of MH370

- March 7, 2014, at 16:42 UTC: MH370 takes off from Kuala Lumpur bound for Beijing.
- March 7, 2014, at 17:21 UTC: MH370 disappears from ATC radar screens as the transponder is disabled. Captures continue on civil and military primary radar as the plane reverses its course in a southwest direction over Malaysia towards Penang, then turns to the northwest towards (Pulau) Perak Island in the Malacca Strait.
- March 7, 2014, at 18:22 UTC: The final capture of MH370 using military radar occurs north of Sumatra near waypoint NILAM. Hourly handshakes between the onboard SATCOM and the Inmarsat satellite network continue for hours.
- March 8, 2014, at 00:19 UTC. The final SATCOM handshake is registered.

Chinese Reaction to the Disappearance

- March 8, 2014: China issues a censorship directive related to the reporting of news surrounding MH370. All subsequent news from Chinese media has to be viewed in this light. The directive is translated by the China Digital Times as:

“The media may not independently analyze or comment on the lost Malaysia Airlines flight. Related coverage must strictly accord with authoritative information issued by the Civil Aviation Administration of China and with Xinhua News Agency wire copy. The domestic aviation department can promptly provide related information to passengers’ family members. All media must refrain from interviewing family members without permission, and must not incite any discontented sentiment. All media continue to give increased publicity to the Two Sessions*.”

<http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2014/03/minitrue-malaysia-airlines-flight-mh370/>

*The Two Sessions could be a translation of the Lianghui, also known as the Two Assemblies, which are the People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

- March 8, 2014: Within hours of the disappearance, the China-based website china.com and Taiwan-based China Times release a story attributed to the US Embassy in Beijing, which is roughly translated as:

“The US Embassy in Beijing claims that USAF Base at U-Tapao in Thailand monitored a distress call from Malaysia Airlines MH370 at 2.43 am. The pilot said that the cabin was breaking apart and he was making a forced landing. Malaysia Airlines was notified.”

<http://news.china.com/focus/mhkjsl/11152538/20140308/18382609.html>

<http://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20140308003502-260401>

The US has never confirmed this story, nor has China ever produced evidence that it received this information from the US despite media requests.

- Author Florence de Changy, in the English version of her book “MH370 Didn’t Just Disappear”, discloses that these reports came from a message on the Chinese social media site Weibo. The message was from an account claiming to represent the US Embassy, but upon further inspection, the account was an imposter account that was made to look like the US Embassy account.
- March 9, 2014: China allegedly hacks into computers of high-ranking officials at Malaysian agencies involved in the investigation of MH370, including the Civil Aviation Department, the

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National Security Council, and Malaysia Airlines. Confidential data is stolen, including minutes of meetings and classified documents. The malware was an email attachment disguised as a news article reporting that MH370 was found. The attack is not reported until August 2014. The nature of the attack suggests it was planned well in advance.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/08/20/chinese-hackers-reportedly-took-classified-data-about-mh370-a-day-after-it-went-missing/>

- March 12, 2014: China releases low resolution satellite images from the SCS of possible debris from MH370 taken March 9 at around 11 am. Xinhua news agency said the images appear to show “three suspected floating objects” of varying sizes. China notably doesn't send the images to Malaysian Civil Aviation director.

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/12/world/asia/malaysia-airlines-plane/index.html>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2014/mar/12/mh370-search-extended-into-andaman-sea-live-updates>

- March 13, 2014: White House press secretary Jay Carney states that based on new information, a search may be opened in the Indian Ocean. A US official also disclosed that the plane might have flown for hours after it disappeared based on data from the satellite communications system.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-satellite-spots-floating-objects/2014/03/13/72688034-aa68-11e3-b61e-8051b8b52d06_story.html?wpisrc=al_national

- March 13, 2014: Malaysia claims that the Chinese satellite pictures of debris in the SCS are not connected to MH370. Vietnamese search planes find no debris.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26559627>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26554875>

- March 14, 2014: Chinese scientists at the University of Science and Technology claim they detected a seafloor seismic event in SCS in the hours after the disappearance of MH370 that could have been the aircraft plunging into the sea. Experts from the US Geological Survey (USGS) disagree, claiming the seismic event was off the west coast of Sumatra.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1448353/us-suggests-search-missing-flight-expand-indian-ocean-mh370-satellite?page=all>

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/03/14/malaysia-airlines-search/6409061/>

- March 16, 2014: Chinese media publish an interview with a Malaysian air force officer in which he disclosed that MH370 passed IGARI and turned back, flying low to avoid radar detection. The turn after IGARI was a clockwise loop. A video was produced by the Chinese to illustrate this path.

<https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=zh-CN&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.soulu365.com%2Fa%2Fnews%2F32582.html>

<http://www.zhuatieba.com/video/XNjg1ODM0ODUy>

- March 22, 2014: Malaysian officials brief the next-of-kin (NOK) at the Lido Hotel in Beijing, but leave the room without taking any questions. After the Malaysian officials leave, the NOK continue with questions, and project a slide showing the path of MH370 with the clockwise loop shown in the Chinese video. This enrages the NOK as there are discrepancies in time and path from the radar data shown to the NOK the previous day (March 21). The author documented this on Twitter.

<https://twitter.com/radiantphysics/status/648202471425376256>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/missing-malaysia-airlines-flight--3272635>

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/missing-malaysia-airlines-flight-mh370-families-anger-overflows-20140322-35awn.html> (video of family reaction is excellent)

- On Corbis, there was a photograph collection from Reuters contributor Kim Kyung-Hoon from March 2014 that included the images of the meetings at the Lido Hotel, including the famous radar image from March 21. In early January 2014, the author noticed that that all photographs from March 22, including the ones that were shown in a number of the author's tweets, were removed from this collection. In early February, the author noticed that all of Kim Kyung-Hoon's photographs were removed from the Corbis archive.

On January 28, 2016, it was reported that Corbis, which was owned by Microsoft Founder Bill Gates, was sold to a Chinese company amidst fears of censorship of important photographs, such as the Tiananmen Square protests. As part of the purchase agreement, Getty Images is permitted to market the Corbis images outside of China, although none of Kim Kyung-Hoon's photographs appear to be included.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/business/media/with-corbis-sale-tiananmen-protest-images-go-to-chinese-media-company.html?_r=0

Some but not all of Kim Kyung-Hoon's photographs can be found in the Reuters image archive, such as the photograph from March 21, 2014 showing the radar data in the Malacca Strait that was shown to the NOK at the Lido Hotel in Beijing. None of the photographs from March 22 appear to be included in the Reuters archive.

- March 22, 2014: China releases images taken on March 18 by its Gaofen-1 satellite showing debris in the SIO at around 45S latitude. However, the floating object was not spotted by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), which is the agency leading the search in the SIO.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/23/mh370-poor-visibility-indian-ocean-search-effort>

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- March 24, 2014: China challenges the analysis of the satellite data that predicts that MH370 crashed into the SIO. China demanded that the satellite data be released to China so they can perform an independent analysis.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/china-seeks-full-evidence-on-missing-flight-mh370-1.1736043>

<http://www.news.com.au/travel/travel-updates/china-casts-doubt-on-malaysias-claims-that-mh370-plunged-into-the-ocean/story-fnizu68q-1226864853547>

- March 24, 2014: Xinhua news agency reports that a Chinese search plane spotted two relatively large floating objects in the SIO near where satellite images showed debris (around 45S latitude). However, a US P-8 Poseidon flying over the coordinates supplied by the Chinese failed to spot any debris.

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-malaysia-airlines-debris-idUKBREA2N07P20140324>

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Latest-News-Wires/2014/0324/IL-76-aircraft-spots-MH370-debris-but-US-aircraft-can-t-confirm>

- April 5, 2014: China's official Xinhua News Agency reports that on the previous day the patrol vessel Haixun 01 detected a "pulse signal" at 37.5 kilohertz — the same frequency emitted by flight data recorders aboard the missing plane — in the SIO. The acoustic pulses were detected just before the batteries of the data recorders were expected to expire.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/04/06/more-ships-rush-probe-signals-plane-search.html>

Many quickly dismissed the validity of the signal for a number of reasons, including only one of the two flight recorders was heard, the listening equipment was primitive, and the signals were not recorded.

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/06/world/asia/mh370-black-box-pings/>

- July 31, 2015: China refuses to contribute to the funding of the search for MH370 in the SIO, leaving Australia to be saddled with the lion-share of the bill.

<http://www.news.com.au/travel/travel-updates/incidents/china-refusing-to-contribute-funds-to-mh370-search/news-story/b8dbd09adcdf5cc9e514f14006a95780>

- August 6, 2015: China believes that the flaperon discovered on Reunion Island confirms that the aircraft crashed.

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/86594723458e422fb691916afc9267dd/latest-flight-370-relatives-frustrated-mixed-signals>

- October 29, 2015: As money runs dry, China is under pressure to help fund the search for MH370.

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<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/10/29/china-under-pressure-to-help-fund-search-for-mh370/>

- November 22, 2015: China agrees to contribute \$14.5 million towards the search of MH370 in the SIO.

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-asean-summit-mh-idUKKCN0TA0EE20151121>

- January 28, 2016: The Chinese vessel Dong Hai Jiu, equipped with sonar, will join Fugro Discovery, Fugro Equator, and Havila Harmony in searching for MH370 in the SIO, which is expected to conclude in June 2016.

<http://www.ibtimes.com/flight-mh370-update-chinese-sonar-vessel-join-search-operation-experts-examine-new-2285474>