

Lack of lead country in probe into aircraft's disappearance hindering investigations
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Dozens of ships and planes from several countries are searching for signs of MH370, but who is taking the lead in organising the search and rescue operations? Who is in charge of the investigation into the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370?

This question has arisen as international air-accident investigators are effectively on standby as they wait to learn which country will end up leading the high-profile probe, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reports.

The report said the two most likely prospects are Malaysia and Vietnam, but until a decision is made, it is virtually impossible to launch a full investigation.

Under international treaties, if the Boeing B777-200ER had gone down in international waters, the Malaysian government will take the lead, but if it had crashed in Vietnamese waters, then officials from that country are likely to head the investigations.

In the interim, however, experts told WSJ, the uncertainty is bound to delay and complicate the search for answers.

Until the location of the wreckage is clearly established, jurisdictional questions will fester and cloud investigative efforts, Jim Hall, former chairman of the US National Transportation Safety Board told WSJ. "At this point, literally no one is in charge," he said.

Both Vietnamese and Malaysian authorities have carefully avoided asserting authority and stayed away from publicly discussing the direction of any investigation, the report said.

With no debris found so far, everyone is cautious about prematurely jumping to conclusions, John Cox, a former union crash investigator and safety official, who is now an airline industry consultant, said to WSJ.

"Everything is absolutely on the table: mechanical problems, pilot issues and terrorism," he was quoted as saying.

Critics have also expressed concern that neither Vietnam nor Malaysia has the staff or institutional expertise to independently run what could be one of the most complex commercial-air probes in recent memory.

The US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has a team of experts in Malaysia poised to help in any probe, along with US Navy ships and planes participating in the search for wreckage.

WSJ said local investigators are likely to solicit considerable help from the NTSB and perhaps other foreign entities, but they are likely to keep such requests private. – March 12, 2014.

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