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NEWS

# UK Says China Has Questions to Answer Over Coronavirus Outbreak

By Reuters, Wire Service Content May 4, 2020



FILE PHOTO: Britain's Defence Secretary Ben Wallace arrives for a weekly cabinet meeting at Downing Street in London, Britain March 11, 2020.  
REUTERS/Peter Nicholls  REUTERS

**BY GUY FAULCONBRIDGE** and Kate Holton

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain said on Monday that China has questions to answer over the information it shared about the novel coronavirus outbreak, but refused to comment on reports that a U.S.-led intelligence consortium had accused Beijing of a cover-up.

The United States has scaled up its rhetoric over Chinese culpability for the novel coronavirus in recent days, with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying on Sunday there was evidence the disease emerged from a Chinese lab.

U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded the virus was not man-made or genetically modified. Washington has so far presented no evidence publicly that the virus came from a lab, which Beijing strongly denies.

The Australian Telegraph reported the U.S.-led Five Eyes intelligence consortium had in a 15-page research dossier said that China had deliberately suppressed or destroyed evidence of the coronavirus outbreak in an "assault on international transparency" that cost tens of thousands of lives.

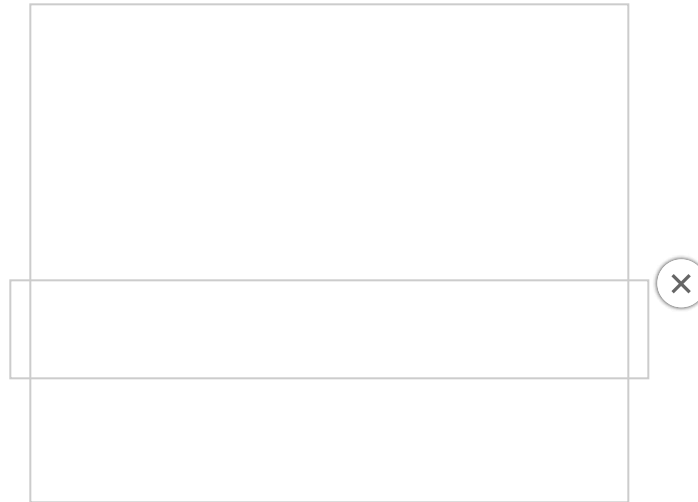
The Five Eyes groups U.S., British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand intelligence services.

British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said: "Every day I get intelligence bulletins from our agencies around the world. I don't comment on individual bulletins, what I have and haven't seen. That would be wrong."

Asked if China had questions to answer over how quickly it made the world aware of the extent of the crisis, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said: "I think it does."

"China needs to be open and transparent about what it learnt, its shortcomings but also its successes," Wallace said, adding that the time for a post mortem was after the outbreak.

Reuters has not seen the Five Eyes dossier and was unable to immediately verify the Australian Telegraph report. One Western intelligence source said it was now widely accepted that China had not been fully transparent.



## CHINA

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday he was confident the coronavirus originated in a Chinese virology lab. He told Reuters in an interview on Wednesday he was looking at options in terms of consequences for Beijing over the virus.

Pompeo said on Sunday there was "a significant amount of evidence" that the new coronavirus emerged from a Chinese laboratory, although he also said he did not dispute U.S. intelligence agencies' conclusion that it was not man-made.

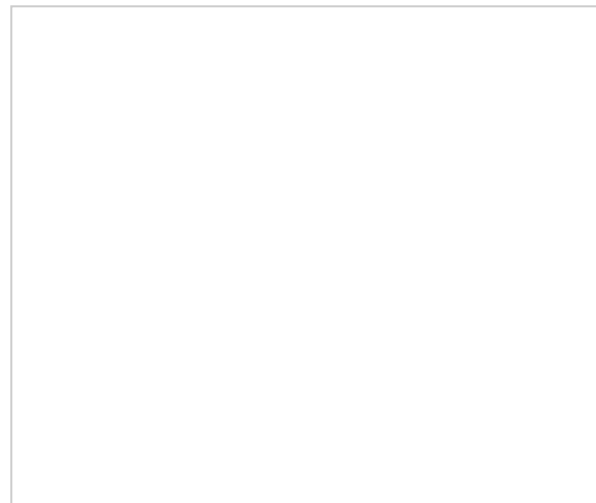
The Australian Telegraph said the Five Eyes document accused China of endangering other countries by covering up news of the virus, silencing or "disappearing" doctors who spoke out, destroying evidence in laboratories and refusing to provide live samples to international scientists working on a vaccine.

"Virus samples ordered destroyed at genomics labs, wildlife market stalls bleached, the genome sequence not shared publicly, the Shanghai lab closure for 'rectification'," the Telegraph quoted the document as saying.

China has repeatedly denied that it covered up any details about the novel coronavirus outbreak, and says Washington is pointing the finger because of its own flawed response. The United States has the most cases and the most fatalities in the world.

"As we repeatedly point out, China has been fighting COVID-19 in an open, transparent and responsible manner," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular daily briefing on April 24.

China's ambassador to London last month said the United States should not seek to bully the People's Republic in a manner reminiscent of the 19th century European colonial war.



(Reporting by Guy Faulconbridge and Kate Holton; Editing by Michael Holden and Peter Graff)

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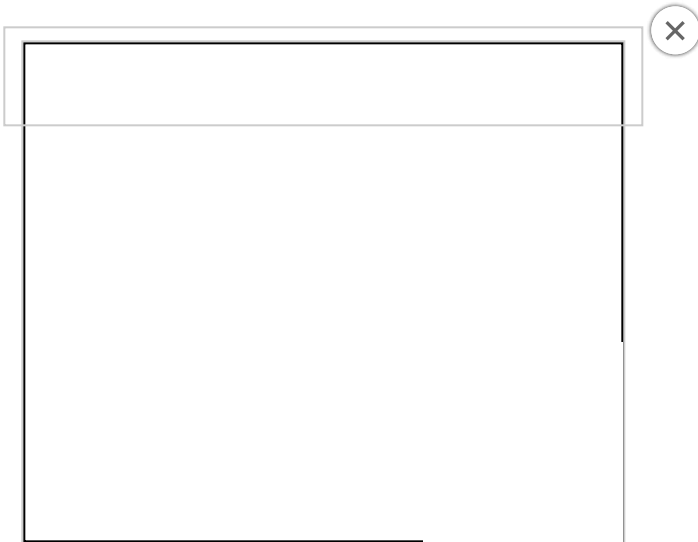
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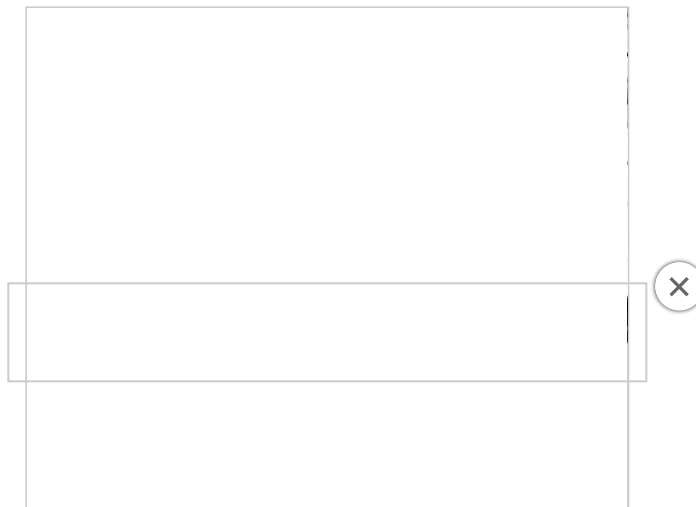
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