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China Demands Guantanamo Uighurs

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China has demanded the return of five Chinese Muslims resettled by the US in Albania after release from the Guantanamo Bay detention centre. Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said the "suspects should be sent to China as soon as possible".

The five were among a group of about 20 ethnic Uighurs held at the military camp in Cuba.

The Uighurs are a minority Muslim group, some of whom want an independent state in Xinjiang, western China.

On Saturday the US announced that the five men had been sent to Albania for resettlement.

US officials had concluded the ethnic Uighurs represented no danger but did not want to return them to China for fear they would face persecution.

'Terrorist suspects'

But the Chinese spokesman condemned the move by the US and Albania, calling it a "gross violation of international law".

"The five people accepted by the Albanian side are by no means refugees, but are terrorist suspects," he said.

He said the men belonged to the "East Turkestan group", a group China accuses of waging a violent separatist campaign in Xinjiang.

On Monday, the Chinese ambassador to Albania, Tian Changchun, issued a press release calling for the five to be repatriated immediately, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

"They fought on the side of Taleban during the Afghan war, and this single fact can prove that they are nothing else but terror suspects," he said.

The Chinese government has frequently cracked down on Uighur dissidents and accuses Uighur militants of waging a bombing and assassination campaign.

It insists that Chinese nationals held at Guantanamo Bay on suspicion of terrorism should be returned.