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Freeing the Exonerated

Editorial
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Fifteen Chinese Muslims imprisoned at the U.S. facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, were cleared for release almost two years ago but still are being held because no country is willing to give them asylum. At least some of them, perhaps all of them, should be allowed to stay in the United States as a matter of simple justice.

They can't be sent to China because the State Department fears they will be persecuted there, as others of their Uighur community have been. China considers supporters of Uighur autonomy to be terrorists.

Five of 15, according to The Washington Post, were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, picked up by Pakistani bounty hunters for rewards being offered at the time by the U.S. government. The least our country can do for holding them in prison by mistake is to settle them here, with their families if possible, as thousands of other refugees from the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia and other trouble spots have been given asylum in recent decades.

The other 10 never had committed any act against the United States, but they had opposed the Chinese government. Some had sought military training in Afghanistan. They could be allowed to stay in the United States, but under some kind of parole arrangement.

Incredibly, the detained Uighurs have been treated as prisoners all along, and were not even told that military tribunals hearing their cases had cleared them. On Thursday, the government told a federal judge in Washington that five of the men had been moved into the least restrictive area of the prison, an area with an entertainment room and an exercise yard.

We have no sympathy for those inmates at Guantanamo against whom there's adequate evidence they were indeed enemy combatants. (Many of those housed at the prison were actually captured in battle.) Clearly they should not be released.

But to keep these exonerated men behind bars, sometimes shackled, is un-American to the point of being ridiculous.