

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

U.S. Sends Chinese Guantanamo Detainees to Albania

Reuters

May 5, 2006

WASHINGTON, May 5 (Reuters) - The United States said on Friday it had flown five Chinese Muslim men who had been held at the Guantanamo Bay prison to Albania, declining to send them back to China out of concern they would face persecution.

The men are ethnic Uighurs, who are from Xinjiang in far western China. Many Muslim Uighurs seek greater autonomy for the region and some want independence from China. Beijing has waged a relentless campaign against what it calls the violent separatist activities of the Uighurs.

"The United States has done the utmost to ensure that the Uighurs will be treated humanely upon release. Our key objective has been to resettle the Uighurs in an environment that will permit them to rebuild their lives. Albania will provide this opportunity," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The Pentagon said it had determined the five men should not be considered "enemy combatants," the label it has given detainees at the prison for foreign terrorism suspects at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The United States has denied those deemed "enemy combatants" rights normally accorded to prisoners of war.