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## CHINASCOPE Analysis Series

### **Why Do the Chinese Praise Bin Laden as a Hero?**

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Summary: After chasing him since September 11, 2001, Americans breathed a collective sigh of relief when bin Laden was gunned down on May 1, 2011. However, many Chinese were upset about Bin Laden's death and praised him as an "anti-U.S. Hero." What made the Chinese eulogize one of the worst criminals of this century? This article analyzes this phenomenon and identifies that the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) promotion of the philosophy of struggle, its relentless anti-U.S. campaign, and the deliberate attempt to belittle human rights and universal values have brainwashed and confused the Chinese people, thus making them unable to tell good from evil.

## Why Do the Chinese Praise Bin Laden as a Hero?

After chasing him since September 11, 2001, Americans breathed a collective sigh of relief when bin Laden was gunned down on May 1, 2011. However, many Chinese were upset about Bin Laden's death and praised him as an "anti-U.S. Hero." What made the Chinese eulogize one of the worst criminals of this century? This article analyzes this phenomenon and identifies that the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) promotion of the philosophy of struggle, its relentless anti-U.S. campaign, and the deliberate attempt to belittle human rights and universal values have brainwashed and confused the Chinese people, thus making them unable to tell good from evil.

### 1. Chinese Praise for Bin Laden

480,000 Chinese people participated in a survey conducted by *Phoenix Online* about bin Laden's death. The first question was "How do you view the U.S. killing of bin Laden?" The following are the results: [1]

1. Happy, the head of the terrorists was finally killed – 87,700 votes, 18.3%
2. Sad, an "anti-U.S. fighter" is down – 287,619 votes, 59.9%
3. Wow, the U.S. finally got revenge after ten years – 58,606 votes, 12.2%
4. Just observing, it has nothing to do with me – 46,157 votes, 9.6%

Some comments made after the survey:

Luckily we have had bin Laden to deal with the U.S. for the past years, which distracted the U.S. Now that bin Laden has fallen, the U.S. will create more damage worldwide. Hope that as one bin Laden falls, more "bin Ladens" stand up! Continue the fight against the U.S.!

- 2011/05/02 13:57, by Jiutianlanyue from Xianning City, Hubei Province

The U.S. has made too many enemies and eventually they got revenge, not just from bin Laden. One bin Laden died, but there will still be a "bin Laden 2," "bin Laden 3," ad infinitum. As long as the U.S. does not give up hegemony, what it will get is endless acts of revenge.

I feel sad for bin Laden.

- 2011/05/02 15:18, by Shenbeilaopu from Shenyang City, Liaoning Province

He dared to fight U.S. imperialism. Definitely a formidable man! Who can compare to him? Only Mao Zedong.

- 2011/05/02 15:11, by Yanzhi from Yueyang City, Hunan Province

A salute to the great anti-U.S. fighter; long live bin Laden's spirit!  
- 2011/05/02 15:11, by Kaixinhaoren from Minhang District, Shanghai [1]

Zhang Xin, Director of the CCTV's Military Channel, stated in his blog, "Bin Laden is the greatest national hero from the Arab world in history." [2]

Throughout China's websites, Chinese netizens' have expressed themselves about bin Laden. The following are a few examples:

Bin Laden, tragic, but a hero in my heart, fought for independence and freedom!  
Bin Laden perfectly explained the meaning of "wherever there is oppression there is resistance!"

Though his way was a bit negative and

Though his ending was a tragedy

But if that bandit country [3] comes to our land to rob us of our resources,

I believe our thousands upon thousands of Chinese will terrorize it more than bin Laden did!

Support bin Laden!

- Comment by Wozuijian (this comment received a rating of 100% favorable) in response to the posting "Is Bin Laden an Anti-U.S. Hero?" [4]

Blog "Anti-U.S. Hero Bin Laden Is Immortal!" by A-Veteran-Soldier-In-Qingdao, who said,

"Only bin Laden, the world hero, dared to fight the U.S. In China it was Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping who dared. Whoever wants to bully us, we should take out our swords to beat that s.o.b. ...

"A small Afghanistan, but a big bin Laden – the firm anti-U.S. fighter, the achiever who did what many people were unable to do, the general architect of '9/11' 'forced-demolition,' and a firm practitioner in the world anti-U.S. camp..." [5]

The blog received many supporting comments:

Let the imperialist [6] never have peace, ha ha ha

- 2011-05-03 09:42, by Kongzhongtianshi

Out media needs more of this kind of voice.

- 2011-05-03 10:31, by qizi [5]

Blog "He put China to Shame, the True Anti-U.S. Hero Is Bin Laden," said,

“Some people thought that the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a minor decade without a hero, but in my heart, there was a true hero for the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s first decade: bin Laden.” [7]

Blog “Was bin Laden an Anti-U.S. Hero? Should He Have Died? Exposing the True Face of the U.S.” said, “bin Laden should not have died. He was a great anti-U.S., freedom fighter, a great national hero, and a pioneer in anti-imperialism!

“If the U.S. did not abuse its power over the world, there wouldn’t be so many anti-U.S. organizations. Bin Laden should not have died. He should be recognized as the ‘World’s Number One Anti-U.S. Hero.’” [8]

Blog “Condolences for the great anti-American hero bin Laden” said “We must turn grief into strength, insist on fighting, and not fear sacrifice. For the heinous crimes committed by the enemy, we’ll let them pay back an eye for an eye. Our endeavor is not destroyed, but rather shows its vitality and superiority and continues to attract people inspired by anti-U.S. thoughts to join.

“His death lets us see clearly the thieving nature of the imperialist and also wakens those young people who worshiped the U.S. We believe, ‘Blood will not be shed in vain. He will always live in our hearts!’” [9]

Comments supporting the blog said:

One bin Laden died, but thousands of bin Ladens stand up to fight the U.S. hegemony!

- 2011-05-05 17:30:48, by Forever-Flying-China-Dragon

The enemy of the U.S. is our friend! That’s also a U.S. principle! [9]

- 2011-05-05 16:01:34, by Desert-Eagle

## **2. Chinese Scholars’ Explanation**

Even some Chinese questioned the “pro-bin Laden” sentiment. The Blog “Is bin Laden an Anti-U.S. Hero?” said, “Bin Laden is known to the world for being the architect of the ‘9/11’ terrorist action. On the Chinese Internet, there are many postings of ‘tearful condolences to the great anti-U.S. bin Laden.’ Though many of them were half-joking, the subtext behind it is worrisome.” [10]

Why do the Chinese overwhelmingly favor bin Laden, a world terrorist leader? Several Chinese scholars explained that Chinese support him because China and bin Laden have the same enemy – the U.S.

*VOA* quoted Li Kaisheng, a PhD and professor who teaches international relations at Xiangtan University in Hunan, who said that it is not that Chinese netizens sympathize with terrorist activities, but rather bin Laden’s status as an “anti-U.S. fighter” makes them mourn him.

“Why (do we) sympathize with bin Laden? Because we are in a complex situation with the U.S.–at the very least we can call it a rivalry. So from the Sino-U.S. relationship angle, many Chinese (feel) that, to a certain extent, bin Laden diverted whatever attention the U.S. paid to China. This was very obvious in the Bush administration’s policy. The strategic focus of the Obama administration has moved further and further east. Now bin Laden has been killed, and I feel that many Chinese citizens think it a great pity. This means less resistance for the U.S. as it moves its strategic focus eastward. The end result is that China will face more and more strategic pressure from the U.S.” [11]

Another comment said,

“Of course, the most important reason for Chinese netizens to grieve over bin Laden’s death was the controversy in Sino-U.S. relations and China’s national interests.

“After the Cold War, the U.S. immediately established China as its contained target. It has continued to challenge China’s core interests, such as Tibet and Taiwan. In 2010, shortly after his trip to China, President Obama chose to meet with the Dalai Lama during the Chinese New Year! He did this to humiliate and provoke China. Besides Tibet and Taiwan, the U.S. has started interfering with China’s claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea. The point is, whether it is Tibet, Taiwan, or the South China Sea, they are unrelated to the U.S. The U.S. is just using China’s interests to blackmail China.” [12]

### **3. Fallacies in the Chinese Netizens’ Viewpoint**

The Chinese netizens’ view of bin Laden echoes a simple formula - “our enemy’s enemy is our friend.” This viewpoint has three fallacies.

#### Fallacy 1: The “U.S. Is China’s Enemy”

The implicit assumption on the part of Chinese netizens is that China and the U.S. are enemies. Actually, though the U.S.-China relationship is complicated, it is never one

of absolute enemies. The Chinese people have the impression that the U.S. is an “enemy” because of the ongoing anti-U.S. campaign carried out in all major Chinese media.

The following are a few excerpts from China’s main state media.

The U.S. government swings back and forth, and even adds insult to injury. In a heartless way it abandoned Mubarak at the critical moment, which not only upset the U.S. allies in the Middle East, but also allowed them to realize the pragmatic nature of U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East.

- *People’s Daily Online*, “The U.S. ‘Changes Face’ in the Middle East” [13]

As of today NATO’s military action in Libya has not been convincing to the international community. Some media think that a particular member of NATO probably uses it as a “toolbox” to implement its own political and diplomatic agenda and to interfere with other countries’ internal affairs.

People in the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not need “world police.”

- *Xinhua*, “Where is NATO’s Boundary?” [14]

It’s best if the U.S. does not regard China as its enemy. Even if it does, there is nothing to be afraid of. With China’s current size, it is no longer the situation that whatever the U.S. wants to do to China it can do.

- *Global Times*, “There Is Nothing to Be Afraid of If the U.S. Views China as the Enemy” [15]

### Fallacy 2: “Our Enemy’s Enemy Is Our Friend”

This argument can be seen throughout many Chinese netizens’ postings. It is based on the struggle philosophy that the CCP has consistently promoted in China. Mao Zedong once stated, “Whatever the enemy is against, we are for it; and whatever the enemy is for, we are against it.”

The following blog exemplifies the viewpoint “our enemy’s enemy is our friend:”

“In February 2001, U.S. President George Bush announced (that the U.S. would) protect Taiwan with arms. In April, a U.S. military surveillance plane hit one of our military planes in the sky above the South China Sea. The U.S. had sent forces to surround us and wanted to threaten China’s rejuvenation! At this critical moment, bin Laden started the world-shocking ‘9/11’ sacred war that changed the direction and strategy of U.S. attacks. The U.S. had to shift all of its attention and forces to the ‘war

against terrorism' and leave China alone. It was bin Laden's direct hit against the U.S. that delayed the U.S. C-shaped plan to deter China! While China has achieved a great national rejuvenation, it should award bin Laden a first-class, top hero medal.

"Let's not forget Saddam – it was he who decided to fight the U.S. army, who used his own life to pin down over one hundred thousand U.S. and Western troops, and who let the U.S. imperialist pay with the lives of over five thousand soldiers at a cost of over a trillion dollars. This bought the wonderful strategic time and space for China's national rejuvenation! Award Saddam a first-class hero medal!

"We should also thank Wall Street. They created the financial crisis so that the U.S. had to focus on its internal matters and ask China to help, which made for a year-long honeymoon for Obama and China. ... Award Wall Street's elite a second-class hero medal!

"Actually, we should also recommend awarding Gaddafi a third-class hero medal! Lastly ... award Iranian President Ahmadinejad a first-class hero medal!" [16]

### Fallacy 3: "Bin Laden's Terrorist Actions Are Irrelevant to Me"

There are two subtexts behind this argument:

First, "I don't care about terrorist actions as long as they do not affect me." In the past several dozen years, the CCP's political movements (1949 – 1976) and pursuit of economic success at any cost (1978 – the present) have made the Chinese become less caring about others. They care only about their own things. Therefore, as long as bin Laden does not attack China or, more accurately, does not attack the person himself, he has no opinion about whether bin Laden kills anyone else.

The following comments that were exchanged on a blog illustrate this point:

Save your condolences when Laden kills you or the people next to you with a bomb. Doesn't the blog writer know that terrorism is the enemy of the whole world?  
- Comment by ff13Xiangcaofan

For everything there is a reason. The U.S. attacked Iraq and attacked Libya. Do any (of those countries that it attacked) not believe in Islam? The cause and effect, you figure it out! Discussing bin Laden attacking China, that'll never happen! You dumb bird! You only know to follow the U.S. ideology. You have no independent thinking of your own!  
- Comment by Bingyicanqing [17]

Second, “a crime against humanity is not a big deal.” To the international community, human rights are universal values. A crime against humanity is a serious crime, but since the Chinese media has systematically downplayed or even demonized human rights and universal values, Chinese are indifferent to crimes against humanity.

Here are a few examples of how China’s state media belittles U.S. promotion of human rights:

Washington used some non-government organizations (NGOs) in the U.S. to carefully train so-called “human rights,” “democracy,” and “non-violence” promoters and organizations in the Middle East and North Africa ... With financial and technical support, (the U.S.) teaches them how to “creatively” use new media and digital technology to mobilize the public, to stir up and arouse the local young people’s and some unhappy people’s extremist sentiments, and to create social turmoil and regime changes, and thus to realize its strategic goal of reforming and controlling the Islamic world.

The U.S. is leveraging its advantages and leadership position in technology to promote the U.S. government’s ideology, to stir up violence in several countries, or even to cause large-scale manslaughter. While the local people suffer chaos or even death, the U.S. gains a pro-U.S. government and more oil and strategic interests.  
- *Xinhua*, “Watch Out for the Hand behind the Turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa” [18]

The U.S. has no real interest in democracy in the Middle East. Its “democracy” promotion is for its own interests.

Seeing this, it won’t be hard for people to understand why (the U.S. has) so made so many changes in its “sublime ideology” and the “universal values” of “democracy and freedom” that it keeps mentioning and so many changes in its attitude toward Middle Eastern countries. Only one thing will never change. That is the U.S.’s strategic interest in controlling the Middle East.

- *People’s Daily Online*, “U.S. ‘Changes Face’ in the Middle East” [13]

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Chinese netizens have only paid attention to bin Laden’s anti-U.S. position. They have ignored the basic fact that Bin Laden is anti-humanity and he is a world terrorist leader. That is largely because of the CCP’s struggle philosophy (“our enemy’s enemy



is our friend”) and the Chinese media’s relentless anti-U.S. imperialism and anti-human rights campaigns.

As a result, many Chinese view the U.S. as the bad imperialist that wants to victimize China, but they can’t tell why bin Laden is bad, because, in their minds, a humanitarian cause is nothing. Therefore, they find it easy to ally themselves with bin Laden against the U.S. imperialist. Thus their praise for bin Laden is sincere.

Yang Hengjun, an independent Chinese scholar, has further elaborated on how the CCP has brainwashed the Chinese people: [19]

“So, I just tried to suggest to (the Chinese youth): Can you not like the U.S., but also not like bin Laden?”

“The first reaction on the part of those young men was as if they didn’t know what I was talking about: was that even a choice? Then they started asking me, ‘Are you a patriot or a traitor?’ Lord! I found out at that point that, in their minds, when talking about China, there were only two choices: ‘patriot’ or ‘traitor.’ It was as if their minds had been programmed. That either/or dichotomy has been drummed into their brains since elementary school and is now a given.

“Thinking about the 28 years after 1949, [20] everyone in China, nearly 1 billion human beings, was categorized into one of only two groups: good guys or bad guys. There was no third choice. You were not a person. You had to be either a ‘good guy’ or a ‘bad guy’ by the (CCP’s) standards. The ‘bad guys’ made up about 5% of the total population. If they were reformed, which meant destroyed either physically or spiritually (usually through brainwashing), then (the CCP) would find another 5% to be the ‘bad guys.’ The entire world is similarly categorized: friend or enemy. Friends are scarce; only North Korea, Romania, and Yugoslavia are our friends. Enemies are abundant; the rest of the world are our enemies.

“For the past few years, I have been writing blogs in China to promote universal values. I thought it would be easy, because some universal values—such as freedom, humanism, making one’s own decisions (democracy), and human rights—are just crystal clear as black and white. However low the person’s I.Q., at most that person might not understand it or accept it temporarily, but there should not be so many people against it. However, in China, ironically, those whose personal rights have been stripped away and those who don’t have freedom and live at the bottom are strongly against ‘universal values.’

“Later I realized that it was not really their fault. This is because their brains were programmed. For example, in many young Chinese minds, ‘democracy’ is a synonym for ‘chaos and separation.’ There is no other option. Therefore, no matter how you explain it to them, when they hear the word ‘democracy,’ a lot of them will automatically think of war, turmoil, and a divided nation.

“How did these ideas get formed and fixed in their minds? Very simple. In their textbooks, newspapers, or on TV, whenever ‘democracy’ is mentioned, it is almost certainly paired with ‘chaos and separation.’ Chen Shui-bian’s corruption [21] almost made ‘corruption’ another name for ‘democracy.’

“I think, it’s easy to explain the principles and the truth, but it’s hard to (change) this fixed mindset. No matter how well you write or how patient you are, how can you fight against the decades of education and the propaganda that brainwashes (the Chinese) people every day?”

#### **Endnotes:**

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2. *Boxun.com*, “CCTV’s Director Zhang Xin Praising Laden As Great National Hero!” May 4, 2011. <http://news.boxun.com/news/gb/china/2011/05/201105040734.shtml>.
3. Refers to the U.S.
4. *Soso.com*, “Is Bin Laden an Anti-U.S. Hero?” <http://wenwen.soso.com/z/q284694227.htm>.
5. *yododo.com*, “Anti-U.S. Hero Bin Laden Is Immortal!” <http://www.yododo.com/diary/012FB132681414A1FF8080812FB0CE2C>.
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7. *Jundao360.com*, “Putting China to Shame, the True Anti-U.S. Hero Is Bin Laden,” January 7, 2010. [http://www.jundao360.com/topic\\_5749714.html](http://www.jundao360.com/topic_5749714.html).
8. *Soufun.com*, “Was bin Laden an Anti-U.S. Hero? Should He Have Died? Exposing the True Face of the U.S.” May 3, 2011. [http://gzbbbs.soufun.com/2811131028~-1~2345/76114185\\_76114185.htm](http://gzbbbs.soufun.com/2811131028~-1~2345/76114185_76114185.htm).
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10. Daguean Forum, “Is bin Laden an Anti-U.S. Hero?” May 8, 2011. <http://bbs.daguean365.com/read-hm-tid-12882.html>.
11. *VOA*, “Some Chinese Netizens Show Sympathy for Bin Laden,” May 3, 2011.

<http://www.voanews.com/chinese/news/20110503Chinas-Reaction-to-Bin-Ladens-Death-121146004.html>.

12. *blshe.com*, “Why Chinese Netizens Felt Sorrow over bin Laden’s Death?” May 4, 2011.

<http://wanglinyuan.blshe.com/post/7382/674766>.

13. *People’s Daily Online*, “U.S. ‘Changes Face’ in the Middle East,” February 25, 2011.

<http://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/40604/14000881.html>.

14. *Xinhua*, “Where’s NATO’s Boundary?” May 5, 2011.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/2011-05/05/c\\_121383029.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/2011-05/05/c_121383029.htm).

15. *Global Times*, “There Is Nothing to Be Afraid of If the U.S. Views China as an Enemy,” May 16, 2011.

<http://opinion.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-05/1694137.html>.

16. *Baidu*, “Anti-U.S. Hero Bin Laden Is Immortal,” May 6, 2011.

<http://hi.baidu.com/%D2%A6%BF%CB%C3%F4/blog/item/c734203cfe747df93c6d97af.html>.

17. *Baidu Blog*, “Silence for Anti-U.S. Hero Bin Laden,” May 2, 2011.

<http://tieba.baidu.com.cn/?kz=1067402755>

18. *Xinhua*, “Watch Out for the Hand Behind the Turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa,” March 21, 2011.

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-03/21/c\\_121209954.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2011-03/21/c_121209954.htm).

19. *163.com*, “How Does Bin Laden Who Has Killed Innocent People Become a Hero?” May 4, 2011.

<http://yanghengjunbk.blog.163.com/blog/static/459641932011450915280/>.

20. Refers to 1949 – 1977, from when the CCP took over China to the end of the Cultural Revolution.

21. Chen Shui-bian was the President of the Republic of China from 2000 to 2008. He is from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which has traditionally been supportive of Taiwan’s independence. After his term was over, he was charged and convicted of accepting bribes. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chen\\_Shui-bian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chen_Shui-bian). Chinese media have extensively reported and commented on these corruption charges.