THE WAPO DECLARES ITSELF UNABLE TO FIND THE TRUTH

The WaPo wants you to know that it—one of the most storied newspapers in American history—is absolutely incapable of sorting through the facts about whether Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's torture turned him into a helpful college professor of terror.

> The debate over the effectiveness of subjecting detainees to psychological and physical pressure is in some ways irresolvable, because it is impossible to know whether less coercive methods would have achieved the same result.

So, throwing up its institutional hands and declaring itself unable to find the truth, let's look at what it does instead.

First, in a 1,400 word article written with the assistance of both of WaPo's spook reporters, they neglect to mention that, after KSM's most intense torture ended, the CIA started to use rapport-based interrogation with him. I guess they didn't think that little detail—that the treatment of KSM immediately preceding the time when he was so cooperative and helpful actually adopted a different approach to interrogation—was worthy of mention.

And that is particularly remarkable considering the most detailed story of that rapport-based interrogation also includes the details about KSM's helpful lecturing that—the WaPo now claims—have previously not been publicized. Call me crazy, but I'm betting the same CIA sources that told the NYT about how successful rapport was with KSM are among those boasting to WaPo about KSM's little lecture circuit. But I guess the WaPo, faced with this "irresolvable" problem, doesn't want to muddy its confusion by mentioning, even once, the use of rapport-based

interrogation with KSM.

Then there's the WaPo's chronological muddying.
It treats several different kinds of sources—the
IG Report, the Pre-Eminent Source document
written in the wake of and almost certainly as a
response to the IG Report, and the human sources
boasting of KSM's lecture series—as if there
were no temporal or reliability distinction
between the them. Which means they use events
that happened in 2005 and 2006, the lecture
series, to reinforce claims made by a
propagandistic document produced on July 13,
2004. Both of which, of course, happened long
after KSM's torture. But that doesn't stop the
WaPo from implying a causal effect between the
torture and the cooperation that happened years
later.

> This reversal occurred after Mohammed
> was subjected to simulated drowning and
> prolonged sleep deprivation, among other
> harsh interrogation techniques.

And, while we're on chronological muddying, it
bears mentioning that the WaPo doesn't note that
KSM went from capture to torture in a matter of
weeks, so any claim that he was
uncooperative—weighed against two years of
rapport-based interrogation—is completely
bogus.

Ultimately, though, what the WaPo shows is that
KSM immediately offered up some information,

> KSM almost immediately following his
> capture in March 2003 elaborated on his
> plan to crash commercial airlines into
> Heathrow airport

Gave false information under torture…

> "During the harshest period of my
> interrogation I gave a lot of false
> information in order to satisfy what I
> believed the interrogators wished to
> hear in order to make the ill-treatment

> stop. I later told interrogators that
> their methods were stupid and
> counterproductive. I'm sure that the
> false information I was forced to invent
> in order to make the ill-treatment stop
> wasted a lot of their time," he said.

And gave false information after torture.

> One former agency official recalled that
> Mohammed was once asked to write a
> summary of his knowledge about al-
> Qaeda's efforts to obtain weapons of
> mass destruction. The terrorist group
> had explored buying either an intact
> nuclear weapon or key components such as
> enriched uranium, although there is no
> evidence of significant progress on that
> front
>
> "He wrote us an essay" on al-Qaeda's
> nuclear ambitions, the official said.
> "Not all of it was accurate, but it was
> quite extensive."

Yet from this, they seemingly willfully declare
the whole problem irresolvable.

This article is fundamentally immoral and
irresponsible. The WaPo had an opportunity to
show the progression of KSM's treatment: almost
immediately to torture, then to rapport, and
after that, helpful though still not entirely
reliable contributions. Showing such a
progression would actually help the WaPo and its
readers to make sense of this so-called
"irresolvable" problem by seeing, first of all,
that CIA didn't try other methods with KSM until
after he had been tortured and that it was
months and years of rapport, not the torture,
most closely tied to his cooperation.

But that would involve a concerted effort to get
to the truth. And once you've declared the issue
irresolvable, I guess, that just takes too much
effort.