

DOES ITS USE OF WATERBOARDING MAKE ISIS MORE OR LESS BARBARIC?

When ISIS beheaded James Foley, pundits in DC pointed to it as proof of the organizations barbarism. Never mind that Saudis were busy beheading people for sorcery in the same period. Not to mention America's latest penchant for executing people with DIY cocktails of lethal chemicals that leave them gasping for breath for hours.

It's very confusing discerning what does and does not qualify an entity as barbaric these days.

The WaPo report that ISIS subjected Foley and others to waterboarding and mock execution makes it all the more confusing.

At least four hostages held in Syria by the Islamic State, including an American journalist who was recently executed by the group, were waterboarded in the early part of their captivity, according to people familiar with the treatment of the kidnapped Westerners.

James Foley was among the four who were waterboarded several times by Islamic State militants who appeared to model the technique on the CIA's use of waterboarding to interrogate suspected terrorists after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

[snip]

French journalist Didier Francois, who was imprisoned with Foley, has told reporters that Foley was targeted for extra abuse because his captors found pictures on his computer of his brother, who serves in the U.S. Air Force.

Francois said Foley was subjected to mock executions – something suspected al-Qaeda operative Nashiri also endured while being held in a secret CIA prison, according to [a report by the inspector general of the CIA](#). The Justice Department did not sanction mock executions.

Note how carefully the WaPo skirts the political minefield and journalistic primer of whether to call waterboarding torture or not. It, unlike NYT, still refuses to call waterboarding torture, probably because its editorial page routinely serves as a lead defender of waterboarding as a value “enhanced interrogation technique.”

Nevertheless, our adversaries have moved beyond dressing up prisoners in our signature orange jumpsuits to using the techniques much of the political establishment has defended for the last decade.

That’s not surprising. It’s sickening. But it’s also going to present an interesting challenge to the DC punditry, as it tries to villainize ISIS in advance of expanding the war against it.

Update: Katherine Hawkins has convinced me that I’m unduly harsh on WaPo’s language here. I think the language in the piece is interesting, but the implications of the story are quite clear.