

John F. Burns, Times Correspondent, Now Retired, Offers A Valedictory

It appeared in The New York Times on April 11. He talks about a fellow journalist, Tiziano Terziani, about covering Russia and China and Afghanistan and Iraq and South Africa (and the places in-between). And in the midst of this, he was allowed to publish the following sentence:

‘From Soviet Russia to Mao’s China, from the Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban to the repression of apartheid-era South Africa, I learned that there is no limit to the lunacy, malice and suffering that can plague any society with a ruling ideology, and no perfidy that cannot be justified by manipulating the precepts of a Mao or a Marx, a Prophet Muhammad or a Kim Il-sung.’

The word “manipulating” is not quite right in the case of Muhammad. It is not manipulating, nor ignoring, but in carefully following, the example of Muhammad, that is in being a True Believer in Islam and in taking part, directly, in Jihad – the struggle to remove all obstacles to the spread, and then the dominance, of Islam, and rule by Muslims, everywhere – that have led to the results we all see, so spectacularly, today, all over the Muslim lands and even among some Muslims, those who are the most ferocious and therefore the most heedless and least calculating of Believers, living in the non-Muslim West, in that enemy territory known as Dar Al-Harb.

At this point, one assumes that it is only because John F. Burns has had such a long run, and is so respected, that the editors at The Times did not dare to try to suppress the appearance of Muhammad along with Stalin, Mao, and Kim Il-

Sung. Perhaps the verb “manipulated” – leaving open the idea that there has been some kind of misrepresentation or perversion of what Muhammad said and did (see the Qur’an and the Hadith and the Sira) – was enough to satisfy them. Or perhaps it was they who urged Burns to use that word when, for all we know, he may in an earlier version have used not “manipulated” but the much more accurate “followed.”