

Nov 04, 2016 by *Gordon Robison*

## Looking Out on Concourse E <sup>[1]</sup>

Amsterdam

Now this is something extraordinary, on several levels.

As I write this I am sitting in Amsterdam's Schiphol airport looking out on a rainy morning far removed from the clear skies and still-warm days in Amman. In addition to a dozen or so KLM planes my window seat offers a view of four Northwest Airlines jets and one apiece from Singapore, Hong Kong, Hungary and Turkey.

As I watch the planes I am surfing the 'net. I bought 24 hours worth of wireless access for 10 Euros (about \$13) from a kiosk in the airport. This allows me to sit here in Amsterdam and use instant messenger to chat with an Iraqi journalist in Baghdad. He begins by telling me his relatives are complaining about the Arab satellite channels' coverage of Arafat's funeral. Too much air time they say, blaming this on a conspiracy between American and Iraqi politicians, all of whom, apparently, are Freemasons (I swear I am not making this up).

Inevitably, though, the conversation turns to Fallujah.

"The situation is barbaric genocide," me friend writes. "I am not defending Zarqawi. I am talking about 50,000 civilians stuck in the city with no water, no power, no food." This is not a man who harbors any particular sympathy for the insurgents.

In the hall of mirrors Iraq has become rumors abound. Consider the following: Al-Bassaer, the paper published by the influential Sunni-led Society of Muslim Scholars, claims the US Marines have used nerve gas in their effort to retake Fallujah. My friend's sources say the insurgents have shelled one of the Marine bases near the city with mustard gas left over from Saddam's era. I reply that those claims are very hard to believe. "The Marines," I write, "would not use chemical weapons unless they were in serious shit, and there are so many Western reporters embedded with them – plus Arab reporters inside Fallujah – that there is no way they could keep that a secret. Can you imagine the Americans trying to explain to the world why THEY had used WMD inside Iraq... of all places?

"As for the insurgents, I find that hard to believe too. Turn the equation around: Just as all those reporters would surely notice the Marines using nerve gas they would DEFINITELY notice incoming mustard gas (form one thing, they would all be running for their own chemical suits!)!

"There is no way on earth that could be kept secret. Impossible."

The fact that rumors like these can spread, and that people are willing to believe them, is a sign of the depths to which all of us – Iraqis and Americans – have sunk. The internet allows rumors – be they of mustard gas use or Masonic conspiracies – to zing around the world

before those passing them on have even had the chance to digest them. One may wonder whether this represents a genuine improvement in the human condition, but, on balance, the ability to plug directly into Baghdad and spend two hours chatting about the situation there, in real time, virtually cost-free has got to be a good thing.

"The world," my friend writes, "is turning out to be a small town."

grr

---