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'Blood libel' Alive and Well

By Joseph Farah

I've said it before and I'll say it again: There will be no lasting or real peace in the Middle East until Arabs stop demonizing Jews.

Many Arabs like to say they lived in harmony with their Jewish brothers and sisters until the state of Israel was created in 1948. This, like so much of official and unofficial Arab rhetoric about the Jewish state, is a lie.

In 1840, a vicious rumor began spreading in Syria. A priest, Father Toma, supposedly went to the Jewish Quarter of Damascus and never returned. The story was that the priest was slaughtered by a group of rabbis and other Jews. Not a drop of blood was spilled. It was collected, so the infamous "blood libel" story went, and used to make Passover matzoh.

The result of this rumor was the death, torture and plunder of countless Jews throughout the Arab world.

That was 160 years ago, but guess what? The blood libel story is alive and well and making the rounds of the official Arab press and television shows. Last month, alone, it resurfaced in two prominent places.

On Oct. 24, the Palestinian Liberation Army Mufti, Sheikh Col. Nader Al-Tamini, said in a television debate on the Qatari Arabic cable news channel Al-Jazeera that there can be no peace with the Jews because they suck and use the blood of Arabs on the holidays of Passover and Purim.

Just four days later, the official Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram published a full-page article by columnist Adel Hamooda titled, "A Jewish Matzoh Made from Arab Blood." It retold the infamous blood libel story of 1840 in great detail, recounting it as a documented historical fact.

The author went on to explain that the Jews' "bestial drive" to add the blood of non-Jews to matzoh is at the root of the violence and killing of Arab children in Israel today. Arab children, he wrote, are often found torn to pieces without a single drop of blood in their bodies.

"The most reasonable explanation is that the blood was taken to be kneaded into the dough of extremist Jews to be used in Matzohs to be devoured during Passover," he wrote.

Huh? That's the most reasonable explanation? The answer is yes to the hysterical propagandists of the Middle East.

The "blood libel" story has been told over and over again through the years. But it has more currency today in the Arab world than perhaps ever before.

Why? Because you can't tell a lie about Jews that is too big for the Arab governments, Arab schools and Arab press. As an Arab-American, I wish that were not true. But it is.

It is also true that as long as such lies are spread, there is no chance for improving relations between Jews and Arabs. There is no chance for peace between Israel and her neighbors. There is no chance for reconciliation between these two peoples.

Unfortunately, I can predict the reaction from many of my Arab brothers and sisters: "Great! We don't want peace with these monsters. We don't want better relations. We don't want reconciliation with the Jews. We want only victory over them!"

As one of the very few commentators of Arabic heritage who dares to point out the obvious incredibility in such horror stories, I will be called names. I will be vilified. I will be threatened, intimidated and harassed.

That's OK. Somebody's got to say it. Someone has to tell the truth. It's long past time — about 160 years past time — that someone stood up and characterized these ugly rumors as exactly what they are, unforgivable blood libels against an entire people.

Please don't tell me this is a two-way street. Sure, some Jews are guilty of hot rhetoric about Arabs. But nothing like this. Nothing. Nowhere. Not now or ever. Hate speech like this would not find its way into any newspaper in Israel. No television station would broadcast lies of this magnitude. No, this is an Arab problem — hateful hyperbole run amok.

The first step to true and lasting peace in the Middle East must be to shatter the foundation of lies beneath the never-ending negotiations, one-sided concessions and the war of attrition that lead nowhere but to more bloodshed, death and destruction. Can we at least agree to put the blood libel stories to rest, once and for all?