A doctor's oath and occupied Palestine

Part symbolic ritual, part solemn commitment, it is the Hippocratic oath that doctors have been obliged to recite for millennia. Dr Goel, a Toronto family physician and teacher, has made it plain throughout her career that every word of that oath imbues her every deed as a healer.

Beyond her fidelity to the oath's more familiar aspects, Dr Goel, by all accounts, has always kept this lesser-known instruction front of mind: "I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings."

As such, in her practice, Dr Goel has tended to the poor, the homeless, the stateless, the addicted, the troubled in mind, body and spirit. And, unlike her often more circumspect colleagues, she has spoken up, whenever necessary, in her patients' defence because that "special obligation" requires her to do so.

Dr Goel understands, her friends say, that this abiding obligation extends to human beings in desperate need beyond Canada's borders. In the past, this has meant expressing solidarity, from time to time, with besieged Palestinians on Twitter and elsewhere.

So, when violence erupted earlier this month in Israel and occupied Palestine, Dr Goel exercised her obligation yet again to draw attention – as deliberately as she could – to the suffering and trauma being visited largely upon Palestinian children, women and men. Shortly after she tweeted in support of the Palestinians, a letter was released, penned allegedly by "students, residents, and physicians" affiliated with the University of Toronto's medical school, where she teaches.

The letter is a ridiculously short and, at times, nonsensical, jargon-laced, hodgepodge of unsubstantiated allegations, grievances, and hysterically out-of-context references to three tweets penned by Dr Goel that, taken together, the authors apparently consider prima facie evidence of a "prevailing culture of antisemitism and xenophobia" at the medical school and, more particularly, grounds for her immediate dismissal.

I am not going to dissect the letter's flimsy, sinister construct of Dr Goel's tweets since that would mean repeating the calumny in order to discredit it. In any event, Dr Goel does a clinical and persuasive job of condemning anti-Semitism and addressing the true meaning and context of each tweet in this thread on her Twitter account. Her detractors would be wise to read it.

The transparently unserious nature of the supposed ammunition the letter-writers gather to make such serious allegations against an esteemed faculty member is compounded by the instructive fact that none of the offended "students, residents, and physicians" attached their names to the defamatory note.

These unidentified "students, residents and physicians" have singled out Dr Goel for censure and are, in effect, blaring anonymously: J'accuse.

That Dr Goel's accusers have chosen collectively to issue a so-called "open" letter from the agreeable comfort of the shadows not only reflects their malicious motivations, but conveniently shields them from having to defend openly their spurious insinuations and avoid experiencing the possible costly consequences of their reckless actions.

Their inability to respond substantively to the intelligent, cogent findings of Israel's history of prosecution of apartheid against Palestinians as a matter of international law without reflexively shouting "anti-Semitism" in a scattershot letter also confirms just how bereft of gravitas their feeble indictment of Dr Goel is.

Still, while their identities are concealed, the poisonous intent is clear: to sully Dr Goel's reputation and to strip her ultimately of her well-earned place as an advocate for the poor, the homeless, the stateless, the addicted, the troubled in mind, body and spirit in the faculty of one of Canada's top medical schools.

The letter's other, unspoken aim was, I suspect, a warning flare to other medical school faculty and students not to join Dr Goel in making common cause with Palestinians online to avoid being tarred as anti-Semites, as well.

They failed.

First, word is that Dr Goel has not been disciplined and is not the subject of an investigation by University of Toronto administrators. Second, more than 1,000 medical students and physicians co-signed a letter and petition that was, at once, a vigorous defence of Dr Goel and a stinging, point-by-point rebuttal of a "deeply problematic letter calling for the dismissal of a valued professor" and "grave and unsubstantiated allegations of anti-Semitism."

The letter goes on to scold Dr Goel's would-be censors for conflating "criticism of the state of Israel or the ideology that is used to justify Israel's war crimes (as pointed out by Human Rights Watch and other reputable organisations) [as] anti-Semitic."

The signatories ended their response with this blunt admonition: "There is absolutely no room for anti-Semitism in our medical school.

However, equally, raising inflammatory and potentially defamatory claims about colleagues is also unacceptable."

Later, Dr Goel joined almost 3,000 healthcare workers from across the country in signing another letter calling on Canada to denounce the recent attacks on Palestinians, including the ruinous assault on Gaza's health and civilian infrastructure; to end its military support to Israel that helps enable the occupation of Palestine; and to end the institutional censorship of Canadians who publicly defend the human and civil rights of Palestinians.

To her credit, Dr Goel continues to tweet about occupied Palestine – undeterred, unafraid and unbowed.

In words, tweets and deeds, she embodies the power and necessity of breaking what Palestinian Canadian academic and writer, Mark Muhannad Ayyash, describes as the "fear barrier".

For too long, declaring support for imprisoned Palestinians has been considered risky business. For too long, declaring support for imprisoned Palestinians has invited the hyperbolic wrath of Israel's evangelical allies who too quickly equate the defence of one people as an anti-Semitic attack on another.

Armed with honesty, resilience and unwavering fealty to her oath, Dr Goel is proof that the old modus operandi designed to quash criticism of Israel's inhumane designs in occupied Palestine is, bit by inevitable bit, losing its potency. The corollary, of course, is that Dr Goel is an eloquent example to others to let go finally of their worry and reticence and, instead, call out the wounds and injustice that generations of Palestinians have had to endure.

By defeating fear, Dr Goel remains faithful to the final passage of the oath she swore to uphold: "May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help." Aljazeera

The Middle East has a missile problem with Iran at its heart

The Middle East has a missile crisis driven by Iran's quest for regional expansionism.

While reminders of Tehran's malign influence can be found across the region, its most recent manifestation is particularly troublesome: The fourth Gaza war saw Hamas fire over 4,000 projectiles in 11 days of unprecedented barrages. When juxtaposed with Hamas' 4,500 missiles fired over the course of 50 days back in the 2014 standoff, it is no surprise that military planners find such a marked increase rather unsettling.

Quantity is merely one dimension – the magnitude, reach, and precision of Hamas' arsenal is witnessing an alarming uptick. In this latest confrontation, Hamas rolled out new weapons including unmanned submarine drones, attack drones, and the "Ayyash," an unguided rocket with a 250-kilometer reach. These arsenals share a common origin: The Iranian regime and its ideological custodian, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The link is explicit enough to impel Hamas leadership to publically praise Iran for its support, ranging from engineering know-how to key contraband – including missiles.

Iran's generous missile supply to its network of violent non-state proxy groups is part of a developing pattern across the region. Despite sanctions, rising internal discontent, and international backlash, the Iranian regime remains ideologically committed to training, equipping, and funding its destabilizing network of proxy groups across the region.

Houthi rebels in Yemen rely primarily on Iranian-supplied ballistic missiles and drones to conduct attacks against land-based targets in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while targeting critical shipping routes – such as the Bab el Mandeb Strait – that are central to global energy stability.

Among Iran's ordnance on offer are anti-tank guided missiles, sea mines, aerial drones, 122-millimeter Katyusha rockets, ballistic missiles, Misagh-2 man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), RDX high explosives, unmanned explosive boats, radar systems, and missile tech know-how. Tehran's generous offerings are extended to neighboring Shia militias in Iraq against US forces and facilities on Iraqi military bases.

But arguably the largest, and most extensive menu is offered to Tehran's Lebanese militia proxy Hezbollah. The terror group has amassed a variety of weapons including precision-guided missiles, M113 armored personnel carriers, T-72 main battle tanks, Karrar unmanned combat aerial vehicles, and Katyusha rocket launchers. Hezbollah's armed drone capabilities are equally lethal, and, thanks to Tehran's support, among the most advanced of any terrorist group in the world – its recent use of the Karrar armed drones is a case in hand.

These revisionist terror groups thrive off a regressively bloody and apocalyptic vision – one at explicit odds with regional stability, socio-economic development, and a rules-based global order. It has become glaringly clear that feeding the non-state proxy crocodile only whets its appetite – the sooner this reality is internalized by the international community, the better.

But there's good news: The region's geopolitical center of gravity is rapidly shifting from a zero-sum rivalry to the primacy of multilateral diplomatic dialogue. Tehran would be wise to engage in this unprecedented diplomatic overture and return to international norms, and with it a rules-based global order supported by proactive diplomatic dialogue – if not for regional stability, then at the very least to overcome its dismal state of economic suffocation and political isolation.

The region is experiencing a diplomatic spring, with serious potential to bloom into new era of cooperation wherein states form new friendships and strategically reexamine old ones.

Afghanistan Constitution

From P1

The precise account of the previous year financial budget shall be presented to the National Assembly during the next six months according to the provisions of the law. The House of People shall not delay approval of the budget for more than one month after receiving it and give permission to obtain or grant loans not included in the budget for more than fifteen days. If the House of People during this period does not decide on obtaining or granting loans, the proposal shall be considered approved.

Remembering the history of 'Black Wall Street'

When HBO's TV series Watchmen (2019) and Lovecraft Country (2020) splashed across our screens, recreating the historical event now known as the Tulsa Massacre, Americans of all races were flabbergasted that a story so brutal, so significant had been seemingly lost to history.

Few had known the details of the mass killing of Black people by white mobs in what at that time was thought to be the wealthiest Black community in the United States.

After the collective shock, multiple projects were born from originators such as NBA superstars LeBron James and Russell Westbrook, as well as Dream Hampton (executive producer of the documentary Surviving R Kelly), all aiming to tell this story of Black economic success torn asunder by white racism.

But as is often the case, history is more complex than it seems. Why were there so many African Americans in Tulsa, Oklahoma at the turn of the 20th century? Why were they able to become so successful in a period of time, the late 1800s and early 1900s, known for the collapse of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow?

As I discuss in my book, I've Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land, the story of the Tulsa neighbourhood known as "Black Wall Street" is incomplete without the knowledge of its inception as a Creek Indian town, populated by the Black former slaves of Creek women and men.

The freedpeople used the land they had received through the American government to build a prosperous life for themselves, attracting African Americans from the United States who built upon the existing Black-Native landscape.

Today marks the 100th anniversary of the massacre and it is worth getting its broader history right as we celebrate our new awareness of it and its unfortunate continued relevance to our modern moment.

In the late 1820s and early 1830s, when members of the Cherokee Nation embarked on their now-infamous "Trail of Tears", their forced dispossession from the lands in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, and Tennessee that Cherokee people had called home for millennia, they were not alone. A small number of these tribal members brought with them enslaved Black women and men, who helped ease their burden, performing physical labour and other tasks.

By 1860, these enslaved people would make up approximately 15 percent of the Cherokee Nation. Members of four other slaveholding Indian nations – the Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole Nations – made a similar journey to what was then known as Indian Territory (part of modern-day Oklahoma).

After members of all five nations fought on both sides of the Civil War, in 1866, the United States retaliated by forcing these nations to free enslaved people, provide them with all the rights and privileges of citizenship, and give them land allotments.

Creek freedpeople (those formerly enslaved by Creeks) settled in various places, many staying in what would become Tulsa to create towns and communities, some all Black and others interracial. In the late 1890s, oil was discovered by white Americans and Tulsa increasingly became a hub for speculators, bringing many American settlers.

As free people, Creek freedpeople voted in tribal elections, served as tribal representatives, and built schools and churches for themselves. At the same time, in the United States, after the highs of the 1870s, African Americans found themselves with decreased federal support in the realisation of their right to vote and live unmolested. When they looked West, they saw the land, annuity payments, and rights Black people in Native nations had, and they wanted it for themselves.

They came in droves, brought by newspaper editorials, advertisements, and in-person appeals by town promoters. Per the 1894 and 1910 US Census, between 1890 and 1907, the Black population of Indian Territory increased from 19,000 to more than 80,000. Their presence made Oklahoma the American state with the most towns created and populated by African Americans, referred to as "all-Black towns", While life was not perfect, as Black southerner Mildred Robertson put it, "my people [formerly] lived down at the bottom of Mississippi close to Louisiana… they had a little more freedom in Oklahoma."

Some Black families made it big, like titan and serial entrepreneur and financier O.W. Gurley, while others established comfortable middle-class lifestyles for themselves, catering to their fellow Black Tulsans with auto repair shops, grocery stores, rooming houses, and dentists' offices, among other businesses, creating one of the wealthiest Black locales in the country – hence the term, "Black Wall Street".

Some white Tulsans did not like this, and jealousy was clearly present, though racial violence was not a huge issue until after Oklahoma statehood in 1907. In 1921, what began with a Black teenager named Dick Rowland sharing an elevator with a white woman, prompting her to scream, ended with white Tulsans, including law enforcement, burning down buildings and indiscriminately shooting women, men, and children; Dick Rowland was the spark, but there was much kindling that preceded it.

African Americans flocked to Tulsa because of the lives and opportunities they saw Creek freedpeople and other Black people formerly enslaved by Indians enjoying. In Indian Territory, they were free from some of the reach of white supremacy in a space where tribal governments reigned. This was the specific context that made Black Wall Street possible. But the Tulsa Massacre was a grim reminder that wherever white settlers went, so did their anger at Black success and really, Black existence. **aljazeera**

Despite COVID-19, Pakistan and Afghanistan...

From P3

Following the disclosure of the CIA mission, the Taliban also launched an intense anti-vaccine propaganda campaign on both sides of the Pakistani-Afghan border. Polio teams were attacked in both countries by the militants, and several field workers were killed. It is likely that these factors eroded parental confidence in vaccines and health workers and declines in vaccination rates.

Cross Border Transmission and Vaccine Hesitancy

To this day, parental refusal remains a bigger challenge in both Afghanistan and Pakistan than cross border transmission of the virus, per se, said Baig'.

He said that the ratio of parents' refusal from polio drops fluctuates between 2% and 5% in different areas of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Dr Faisal Sult, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on health, warned, however, that "we have been close before and lowered our guard and polio surged back, so rather than congratulate ourselves on efforts to date, we need to double our efforts and drive harder than ever if we are to truly protect Pakistan's, and the world's children from this devastating disease."

He also stressed the need for a coordinated, whole of government approach encompassing nutrition, primary health care and water and sanitation.

Risk of Resurgence

Despite the sharp decline in the polio cases in Pakistan, polio officer Anil Kumar from Sindh province believes that the risk of resurgence remains as dedicated polio vaccine teams are gradually reduced or reassigned – in Pakistan as well as worldwide.

Kumar criticized the recent WHO moves to abolish around 850 posts of national polio officers – even while the virus lingers in the country.

The cutbacks have come as part of a gradual WHO move to phase out its huge and costly ground support for the polio elimination program – with an eye to the day when the world reaches polio eradication.

However, the strategy has been controversial among countries which have relied heavily upon the polio teams to conduct other vaccine drives too. And indeed, over the past several years, WHO has shifted gradually from talking about outright staff cuts to a more gradual integration of WHO-supported polio teams with other national immunization efforts – as part of developing stronger national immunization capacity.

In the wake of COVID, which saw national polio teams also supporting COVID testing, tracking and containment followed by a groundswell of needs for vaccine teams generally, that approach has been validated.

But even so, countries like Pakistan say that the reality on the ground doesn't always match the rhetoric in Geneva.

In Sindh province, one key at-risk region, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of the Umerkot district wrote a letter to the WHO team lead in the province appealing for the retention of its lost polio officers.

In March 2021, polio workers staged a protest outside WHO's Pakistan country office, demanding a restoration of the 850 cancelled posts. But the head of WHO's Pakistan country office, Dr Palitha Mahipala, turned down their demand. Warned Kumar, "some of the posts have been abolished in high-risk areas where there is still a chance of resurgence of the virus." The report was published by Health Policy Watch.