

## National and International Civilian Protection Strategies in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

by *Timea Spitka*

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The book review examines the scholarly contributions of Timea Spitka (2023), a renowned scholar of identity, international intervention, conflict transformation, and their impacts on minorities. Her research offers careful examination and interdisciplinary analysis of how civilian protection is deployed within one of the most enduring conflicts in modern history. Drawing on human security, feminist peace research, and international law, the book demonstrates how state and international actors perpetuate the conflict under the guise of protection and offers a strong critique of the global protection regime. It also provides profound insights into peacekeeping by debating the myth of protection; what is claimed to be protected, what should be protected, and what actually is protected.

In contemporary peacekeeping practices, Spitka points out how protection of civilians is judged and prioritized based on their geography, identity, ethnicity, religion and political strength in the region. She argues that international law is susceptible to manipulation, frequently serving the interests of powerful states at the expense of less privileged citizens, while the role of NGOs and other international actors, whom she refers to as ice-cream soldiers, is dismissed as performative, limited, and ineffectual.

In the introductory chapter, Spitka explores the ‘myth of protection’ and argues that civilian protection can be selective, ineffective, aggressive, or even exploitative. She examines Pillar III of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), emphasizing its often selective and politically driven use. The author analyses the Israeli apartheid system and shows how Hamas’s 2006 election victory resulted in collective punishment against Palestinians. The discussion then shifts to the joint governance of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas. Spitka focuses her analysis of civilian protection at the national level by looking at the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP), highlighting its limited mobility, which depends on Israeli authorization. She also reviews the Preventive Security Service (PSS), Palestinian National Security

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Forces (PSF), Presidential Guard (PG), and the Palestinian judiciary. She notes that the Gaza Civil Police Force was established after Hamas's 2007 takeover of Gaza. The author criticizes Israeli propaganda against international intervention, pointing out its global campaigns and partnerships with Jewish student volunteers to shape the narrative. She further contends that Israel maintains silence from several countries through lucrative intelligence-sharing agreements, which help sustain international inaction.

Spitka shifts the discourse to gender inclusivity and violence against minorities, noting that at 16 and a half, recruitment and capacity tests for the Israeli military begin. She scrutinizes the Israeli apartheid regime, ethnic cleansing, and violent Israeli eviction practices, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, exploiting sympathy for ongoing accusations of anti-Semitism. The author shifts the perspective to the 9-year blockade of Gaza and its major implications for women. She also criticizes the rule of Hamas' government in accordance with Sharia-based law and its control over how women dress, enforcing gender segregation and violent repercussions against homosexuality. She discusses the wave of Palestinian youth violence from 2015 to 2017, called the "Children's Intifada", against the Israel Defense Force (IDF).

In her concluding chapter, Spitka highlights the necessity for the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations to develop an inclusive peace strategy, emphasizing the importance of exerting substantial pressure on Israel. Spitka's perspective on peacekeeping is critical and normatively driven. Her hands-on experience of witnessing what was happening while residing in Ashkelon, 50 kilometers south of Tel Aviv, and her current affiliation with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem make her work insightful and unique. Her book covers a major gap in research before the Israel-Palestine conflict escalated in October 2023. It challenges the top-down approaches of peacebuilding. Her demonstration of the R2P pillars aligns with the modern UN peacekeeping structure for prevention, protection, and rebuilding. The incorporation of the resilience paradigm mirrors post-liberal missions applied in peacekeeping today. Spitka's narrative of a peacekeeping approach through non-military peace operations emphasizes the significance of civilian-centered strategies for achieving sustainable, long-term peace, which is relevant to current debates.

Modern peacekeeping faces similar challenges: political paralysis, selective intervention, and limited civilian protection. Although Spitka's primary objective is to highlight civilian protection strategies, the organization of chapters slightly shifts towards gender and inclusivity studies, violence against specific groups, and the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Moreover, Spitka's analysis avoids binary blame. Spitka's book is nonetheless a significant contribution to peacekeeping within protracted social conflicts. Its layered approach highlights the limitations of conventional state-centric and military-based protection frameworks and advocates comprehensive, human-centered protection.

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