

## Book Review

# The Impact of NATO's New Missions on the Interests and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Reviewed by **Fahimeh Ghorbani\***

**Mahmoud Mohammadi\*\*** *The Impact of NATO's New Missions on the Interests and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (2010), Center for Strategic Research – CSR (Expediency Council, Tehran, in Persian), 343 pages.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), originally created in the post-WW2 world as an organization dedicated to the collective defense of its member states and a countervailing force against the Warsaw Pact, has undergone tremendous change since. The first major turning point came in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world. The new situation changed the Organization's mission, functions, and policies mainly within the European theatre,

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as best reflected in NATO's military intervention in the Balkans (former Yugoslavia) in the 1990s. The second wave of change came in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent direct engagement in Afghanistan; NATO's new function as a military arm of the United Nations – which continues to date.

Geographically separated from the Atlantic region, Iran for long had little to do with NATO, except neighboring Turkey - a NATO member state since its inception. Iran's membership in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO, 1955-79), which also included Turkey, served to assuage Western security concerns vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the Socialist bloc up until the 1979 Revolution in Iran. Dispatch of General Robert Huyser, the American Deputy Commander-in-Chief of NATO to Iran in January 1979 shortly before the Shah's departure (January 16) and collapse of monarchy (11 February) could perhaps be considered as the most visible indication of NATO's concern with the unfolding situation in Iran. Given Iran's revolutionary outlook in the post-1979 period, inclusive of a highly pronounced anti-American/anti-Western posture and discourse, the Islamic Republic has since its establishment viewed NATO mission and policies negatively. Fact of the matter is that change in NATO's mission and functions since early 1990s, including its systematic eastward expansion, and more so since its engagement in Afghanistan, have significantly increased Iran's exposure to this Western military organization. Currently Iran finds itself neighboring a NATO member in the west (Turkey) and facing NATO forces engaged in active military operations in Afghanistan in the east. The latter situation could indeed be deemed as a matter of national security concern.

The book by Dr. Mahmoud Mohamamdi - *The Impact of NATO's New Missions on the Interests and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran* – which came out a few months ago, represents such a concern in Iran, particularly given his background as a career diplomat and former Majles deputy, and current academic portfolio.



The book is an attempt to look at the implications and repercussions of NATO's actual military presence across Iran's eastern borders for the country's interests and national security. It also attempts to explore the elements of a possible future national strategy in this regard.

The main question in the author's mind is as follows: are NATO's new missions threatening the interests and national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and if so, what strategy should Iran adopt and pursue to safeguard its interests and national security? In addressing the question, the book has been divided into 5 chapters. The first three chapters take up the discussion of such general issues as the legal principles of collective security, and the status of NATO from the vantage point of international law and the structure of power. The last two chapters turn to the concrete discussion of the book's main concern -- presence of NATO forces across Iran's eastern frontiers, and the implications thereof. In the concluding part, the author attempts to present a number of policy suggestions towards dealing with the threats emanating from such a presence and engagement.

In addressing NATO's new missions and approaches in the post-Cold War period (Chapter one), the author focuses on the collective security aspect, with particular emphasis on the existing legal principles in the United Nations Charter and the International Court of Justice. Within this framework, the author takes up the discussion of NATO's engagement in former Yugoslavia (1990s) and Afghanistan (since 2002). He argues that NATO's objectives in these operations are compatible with the global objectives of the United States -- the global hegemon and the single dominant member state of the Organization. In the author's view, these developments have negatively affected the concept of collective security in two ways; firstly, they have placed [certain] countries in the developing South in the position of seeking [national] security through reliance on NATO, and secondly, they have served to undermine the position and



authority of the United Nations as a world organization in the field of peace and security. He further argues that the adoption and pursuit of such approaches/policies would as well involve an additional negative element - with respect to the world public opinion - that international law and peace can be upheld and preserved only through the use of force.

The second chapter, comprised of four parts, deals with the various aspects of change, over time, in NATO's nature, missions, and finally its expansion. This chapter undertakes to assess the effects of change in the Organization's concepts, structures, and missions on the enhancement of its status and role from a regional body to an international institution. Drawing on different interpretations of the provisions of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter as the justifying context for the *raison d'être* of the trans-Atlantic Treaty and its missions and functions, Mohammadi concludes that NATO's new missions as a "guarantor of global security" do in fact overlap with those of the United Nations. They serve, *inter alia*, to undermine the UN stature, authority, and role – as already indicated - and also tend to encourage NATO member states to interfere in other regions as well as in the internal affairs of other countries.

Within the context of an overall theoretical framework explaining the existing global power structure, Chapter three addresses the relationship between NATO and a number of other influential world bodies; European Union (EU), Group of Eight Major Industrial Powers (G-8), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), UN Security Council (UNSC), and the World Bank (WB). The chapter also looks at the catalogue of states which are simultaneously members of NATO and these organizations/bodies. The chapter moreover looks at NATO's current challenges; divided into two broad categories; intra-Atlantic (such as military/security rivalry among member states, reduction of threats, independent European identity, and opposition to the United States), and supra-Atlantic (such as terrorism and opposition from



Russia, China, and India).

Chapters four and five turn to the essence of the book's problematique, appraisal of the impact of NATO's new missions on the interests and national security of the Islamic Republic. Chapter four, entitled "NATO in the Iranian Geopolitical Domain," addresses the presence of NATO bases and forces in such critical geopolitical areas as Central Asia, Caucasus, Middle East, Persian Gulf, and the Mediterranean basin, indicating the growing expansion in the Organization's reach. The first part of the chapter deals with NATO's relations and interactions with some of Iran's neighbors - Turkey, Iraq, Russia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The second part addresses NATO's relations and interactions with the regions surrounding Iran; Persian Gulf in the south, Central Asia and the Caucasus in the north, and also the Greater Middle East and the Mediterranean. Aside from the author's peculiar classification of countries into neighbors and otherwise – which could be a matter of disagreement unrelated to the present discussion - he is of the view that further presence of NATO forces in the proximity of Iranian frontiers, NATO's collaboration with Iran's neighbors; and the application by NATO of an expanded definition of the concept of security; not to mention outstanding ideological and political differences between Iran and NATO member states, all can be considered as threats against the Islamic Republic and its interests and national security.

And finally, in Chapter five, Mohammadi undertakes to assess the NATO-related challenges and threats and the possible future national strategy to deal with them. In his analysis, geopolitics, energy, ideology, and technology – as underlined by Dr. Hassan Rouhani in the Preface to the book - constitute the major factors that influence and shape NATO's policies in the critical geopolitical areas mentioned before and also determine Iran's status in the international system. While a catalogue of Iran's major national security concerns emanating from NATO's new missions and much expanded role and functions is discussed in the first part of the chapter, parts 2 and 3



deal with the elements of geopolitics, energy, and technology in NATO's policies. The significance for and impact of these elements on Iran's status within the international community are also discussed in these two parts. In part four of the chapter the author looks to the future and explores the possible elements for a strategic approach to address and deal with the NATO-related challenges. They include the strategy of possible selection; non-military relationship with NATO; and indirect relationship with NATO through other states. It should be added, however, that a theoretical discussion on the four major factors mentioned before would have probably helped to strengthen the author's analysis in Chapter five.

In the concluding part of the book, the author rejects the possibility of NATO's collapse or dramatic change in the essence of its mission or requisite policies. Given this and also drawing on the continued relevance of the factors of geopolitics, energy, ideology, and technology, both for Iran and NATO, the author considers the possibility of two policy approaches; one, Iran's security-making collaboration with NATO, and two, continued rivalry and even confrontation between Iran and NATO. Preferring – needless to say – to see the realization of the first policy option, the author proceeds to present a catalogue of areas of possible common concern between the two sides: combating terrorism (Al-Qaeda, Taliban), weapons of mass destruction, extremist nationalism, security of energy routes, combating drug trafficking, and migration, among others. In his view, however, NATO's current perceptions of threat and unilateral insistence on its outlook and requisite policies would further exacerbate the current situation of mutual suspicion and distrust and tip the balance to Iran's disadvantage. In the author's analysis, NATO's somewhat aggrandized concerns about Iran's ideological posture and growing military prowess seem to have forced the Organization's decision-makers to be unrealistically worried about Iran and its future approaches and policies – even in the field of development. It is interesting to note that given the continued tension



between Iran and the United States, the author proceeds in his closing words to caution against the negative impact of growing US posture and weight within NATO – which, if prevented, would, in his view, serve to facilitate a gradual rapprochement and actual interaction between Iran and NATO. In his final reckoning, Mohammadi believes that unless Iran and NATO adopt an interactive approach towards each other, albeit gradual, the continuation of the current state of suspicion and rivalry might move in the direction of possible confrontation – an eventuality to be avoided by all means.