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US strategic engagement
in south caucasus via
TRIPP: ICWA

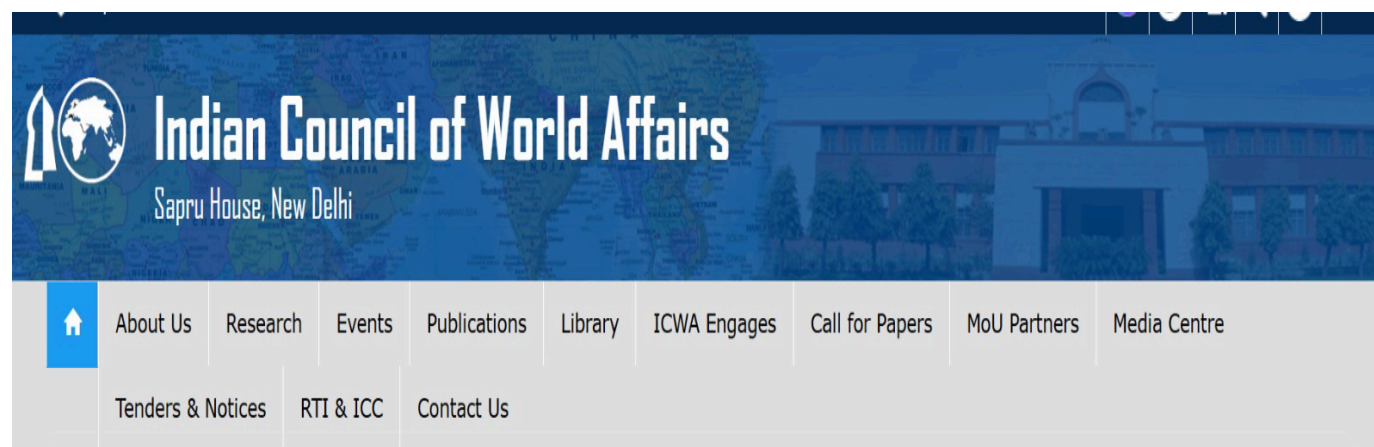
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Article - 1 : US strategic engagement in south caucasus via TRIPP



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US Strategic Engagement in the South Caucasus via TRIPP: Regional Geopolitical Implications

Dr. Punit Gaur | 06 April 2026

Introduction

On January 13, the US and Armenia announced an implementation framework for the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), a multimodal transport corridor intended to improve connectivity and trade in the South Caucasus. The project seems to link Central Asia and the Caspian region with Europe, while connecting Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. US Secretary of

Context

US-backed TRIPP corridor through southern Armenia is not just a transport project, but a major geopolitical move that can reshape peace, trade & power balance in the South Caucasus.

Facts

- TRIPP is a US-backed corridor through southern Armenia connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan & linking South Caucasus to the wider Trans-Caspian route.

- Expected gains are 2 million tonnes freight annually, 30% shorter transit time & 15% lower tariffs.

- The route will remain under Armenian sovereignty & Armenian law, with no Azerbaijani role in administration.

- Armenian sector is just 27 miles (42 km), but major strategic importance.

Analytical Crux

- TRIPP is not simply a transport corridor ; it is a tool through which the U.S. is entering South Caucasus as a long-term strategic actor.
- The project tries to balance two difficult goals together : Azerbaijan's access to Nakhchivan & Armenia's sovereignty.
- For Armenia & Azerbaijan, connectivity is being used as an instrument of peace, but for Russia and Iran the same project looks like a loss of influence.
- So the main issue is not only road, rail and cargo ; the real issue is who shapes the regional order in the South Caucasus.
- In crux, TRIPP shows that in present world politics, corridors, trade routes & infra have become instruments of power, diplomacy & geopolitical competition.

Verbatim Quotes

by Dr. Punit Gaur

"If realised, it could transform the South Caucasus from a geopolitical faultline into a stable & prosperous corridor, anchoring U.S.."

"TRIPP seeks to transform the Central Asia - Caspian - South Caucasus - Europe axis into a functional, integrated corridor."

Article - 2 : America has lost the Arab World

America Has Lost the ...

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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America Has Lost the Arab World

Wars in Gaza, Iran, and Elsewhere Have Sunk Washington's Reputation—Maybe for Good

AMANEY A. JAMAL AND MICHAEL ROBBINS

April 7, 2026



AMANEY A. JAMAL is Co-Founder and Co-Principal Investigator at Arab Barometer, Dean of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, and Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

Context Gaza war, the Iran conflict and Washington's perceived double standards on Palestine have deeply damaged America's credibility in the Arab world, while China, Russia and even Iran are gaining space mainly because US is seen as compromised.

Facts

Arab Barometer surveyed Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian territories, Syria & Tunisia in 2025.

● In Egypt, 58% said China upholds international law, compared to only 25% for the U.S.

● Support for normalization with Israel is very low across region; in Egypt & Jordan it is 4%.

● If Israel recognizes Palestine, support for normalization rises: +27 in Syria, +23 in Jordan etc.

● Two-state solution still has majority support; 67% in Jordan & 64% in Egypt and Syria.

Analytical Crux

Arab public opinion is no longer judging the USA only by power or security guarantees; it is judging it by fairness, especially on Palestine. China, Russia and Iran are gaining ground not because Arab societies fully trust them, but because Washington is now seen as the more hypocritical power. Gaza has therefore become a test of legitimacy for the whole Western-led order, not just a regional conflict. If this continues, even pro-U.S. Arab governments may slowly widen ties with China & Russia because public opinion raises the political cost of open alignment with Washington. America can recover its standing by a visibly fair policy on Gaza, Iran and Palestinian rights.

Verbatim Quotes

by Amaney A. Jamal and Michael Robbins

"The warning in Arab Barometer's latest data is clear: the U.S. & Europe are not just losing hearts and minds. They are losing the perception that they protect human rights at all."

"As long as Gaza remains the clearest measure of moral and political judgement for ordinary Arabs, China, Iran and Russia will retain the moral high ground."

Article - 3 : United States and Israel don't get Iran

US and Israel don't get Iran. Their prospects of a military victory are weak



GAUTAM MUKHOPADHYAYA

FIVE WEEKS into an unprovoked and unjustified Israel-US war on Iran that started with the unprecedented "decapitation" of the top Iranian political and military leadership and a massive attack on its military and civil infrastructure, the US-led war seems to be faltering. Extraordinarily, the collective assassination of Iran's leadership in violation of all laws, domestic or international, took place while the US and Iran were holding negotiations mediated by Oman on Iran's nuclear programme, the ostensible *casus belli*. It shatters basic assumptions of diplomatic immunity and negotiations, leaving little room for good faith and diplomacy to end the war.

Despite a serious degradation of Iran's air force, missile defence, navy and defence production since the start of the war, Iran has been able to threaten Israeli, US and Gulf military, oil and other targets in the region with its seemingly deep and dispersed store of missiles and drones. It has leveraged its geography and control of the Strait of Hormuz to rattle Western capitals and markets. An estimated 3,000 ships with 20,000 sailors, many of them Indians, are reportedly anchored in and around the strait, facing food and water shortages and psychological stress. This is a potential humanitarian challenge for which the international community is ill-prepared.

Despite the theocratic Iranian regime's harsh suppression of human rights and internal reform, attempts at internal and externally sponsored regime change and fomenting ethnic conflict, inciting the Kurds and the Baluch, have not gained momentum. Fears of a sectarian Shia-Sunni conflict have not been borne out, with Sunnis largely backing Iran's defiance of the US and Israel. Iran is now daring the US to launch a ground invasion, projecting confidence in its ability

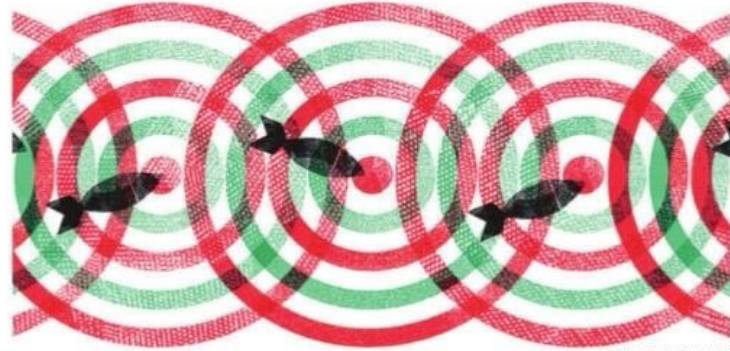


ILLUSTRATION: C R SAKSHUMAR

to withstand it. An air operation on April 4 resulted in an embarrassing downing of F-15s and other sophisticated US aircraft. This does not augur well for ground operations.

The US is, simultaneously, threatening a ground invasion of Iran and naval operations as well as demanding that the Strait of Hormuz be opened. It's also demanding that its Western allies join the war, or it might pull out of NATO. It has threatened to walk out of the war, leaving allies to deal with their interests and consequences on their own. It is not clear if Washington fully grasps the risks and implications of these actions. President Donald Trump's March 31 threat to bomb Iran back to "the stone ages" is an implicit acknowledgement of the failure of the initial goal of regime change.

Meanwhile, as Israel expands the conflict once again into Lebanon — establishing a security zone, ethnically cleansing Lebanon south of the Litani river and bombing historic cities like Tyre and Beirut (including residential areas) — more Western "allies" are breaking ranks with the US and Israel over the war.

The Trump regime's error is in thinking that Iran is like Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Libya under

Whether or not brute US-Israeli power prevails in the long run, Iran seems to have survived the elimination of its top military leadership for now. Its potency may be debilitated but it is far from incapacitated

Muammar Gaddafi, or Syria under Bashar al-Assad. First, unlike the Arab, Central Asian, Turk and Mughal empires that grew by "incorporation" and were too dispersed to become "nations", Iran has always had an inbuilt sense of identity, nationhood and civilisation bound by language, culture and history, which has the capacity to submerge fissiparous tendencies. Although Israel may be betting on inciting Iran's multiple ethnic and religious minorities like the Kurds, Baluch and others against the theocratic regime, the Persian "glue" and nationalist reaction to Zionist anti-US-Israeli aggression are likely to hold it together.

Second, Iran has inherited the mantle of a Shia sense of belonging, struggle, sacrifice and martyrdom going back to the Karbala and Imam Hossein, which was given a contemporary twist by the anti-Shah, anti-US revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, the gruelling Iran-Iraq war and Israel's occupation of holy Muslim lands. In keeping with Shia tradition, it is believed that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei chose to embrace martyrdom rather than flee when Israel attacked Iran's top leadership.

Third, what the US seems not to

have understood is that, unlike Gaddafi's Libya, Hussein's Iraq, Assad's Syria, or Maduro's Venezuela, Iran is not some personalised dictatorship backed by a muscular but contrived political ideology. It has a deeply institutionalised, culturally nationalistic, theocratic system where different stakeholders were balanced and reconciled through institutions that evolved organically over successive crises and ruthlessly enforced by the IRGC. The removal of the "Supreme Leader" is not likely to change a layered decision-making system proven over decades. Rather, external aggression may well change the balance in favour of more adventurist forces that could raise the cost of war for the US and its Gulf allies even further.

While vast sections of Iran's highly polarised society detest the orthodox, conservative and repressive regime in power, one should not underestimate the capacity of the mass of the Iranian people to separate internal grievance from aggression by external forces, or the capacity of the regime to reframe the conflict in defensive and civilisational terms.

Whether or not brute US-Israeli power prevails in the long run, Iran seems to have survived the elimination of its top military leadership for now. Its potency may be debilitated but it is far from incapacitated. Many military experts believe that it has used its store of cheap missiles, drones and decoys to successfully deplete much of the US and Israel's far costlier missile defence capability, amidst uncertainty over the stocks, range and production capacity of Iran's own missiles. The downing of four US aircraft on April 4 will be a huge shot in the arm for Iran.

But Iran's greatest asset is probably its ability to influence two crucial geographic chokepoints for world shipping, the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandab (through the Houthis). It is using these assets to raise the cost of war and shipping to prohibitive levels, which is rebounding on its allies and business partners. If the prospects of a military victory for the US and Israel are distant, if not bleak, a favourable negotiated outcome seems even less likely.

The writer is former ambassador to Myanmar, Afghanistan and Syria

Context U.S. and Israel have missed Iran, because Iran's national identity, institutional depth and control over key maritime chokepoints make a quick military victory very difficult.

Facts

The attack happened while US-Iran nuclear negotiations, mediated by Oman were still going on.

Even after these losses, Iran could still threaten Israel, US and Gulf targets through its deep missile & drone stock.

The feared Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict has not materialised; Sunnis backing Iran's defiance.

Present-day Iran's political identity is linked to 1979 anti-Shah, anti-US revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Analytical Crux

The U.S. and Israel are treating Iran like a weak regime that can be broken quickly, but the author says Iran is not that kind of state. Iran's strength lies not only in weapons, but also in its national identity, Shia political memory and strong institutions. So, external attack may strengthen internal unity instead of producing regime collapse. At the same time, Iran's leverage over Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandab, missiles & drones makes the cost of war much wider than the battlefield. A clear military victory looks difficult and diplomacy has become weaker because trust was damaged even during negotiations.

Verbatim Quotes

by Gautam Mukhopadhaya

"The Trump regime's error is in thinking that Iran is like Venezuela under Nicolas Maduro, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Libya under Muammar Gaddafi or Syria under Bashar-al-Assad."

"The Persian 'glue' and nationalist reaction to Zionist and anti-US-Israeli aggression are likely to hold it together."

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