

Examining Iran's Diplomatic Relations from the Perspective of Port Engineering Development

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This study examines Iran's diplomatic strategies in port engineering development, assessing how international partnerships and geopolitical dynamics influence maritime infrastructure expansion. The research employs a descriptive analysis method, utilizing qualitative content analysis of academic literature, policy documents, and international trade agreements. Data sources include scholarly articles, government reports, and regional cooperation frameworks published between 2021 and 2025. The study explores Iran's bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements, including partnerships with China, India, and Russia, as well as its participation in regional organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The analysis focuses on the impact of sanctions, investment barriers, and technological constraints on Iran's maritime trade policies and port modernization efforts. The study finds that Iran's port development is heavily shaped by diplomatic engagements, economic sanctions, and strategic alliances with non-Western partners. While Iran has leveraged agreements with China, India, and Russia to secure infrastructure investment and expand trade corridors, financial and technological limitations continue to hinder full-scale modernization. The role of regional cooperation has been instrumental in maintaining maritime connectivity, but sanctions have restricted Iran's access to global financial institutions and technological advancements. The analysis also highlights both successful and failed diplomatic negotiations in port expansion, illustrating the challenges and opportunities in Iran's maritime sector. Iran's diplomatic approach to port development has allowed it to partially circumvent economic restrictions and integrate into alternative trade networks. Strengthening regional alliances, investing in port technology, and enhancing trade diversification strategies will be essential for long-term economic sustainability and global trade competitiveness.

Keywords: Iran, port engineering, maritime trade, diplomacy, economic sanctions, regional cooperation, infrastructure development, global trade networks.

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1. Introduction

Iran's diplomatic relations play a crucial role in shaping its economic and infrastructure policies, particularly in the maritime sector. As a geopolitically significant nation with access to the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, Iran has historically leveraged its strategic location to facilitate trade and strengthen economic ties with regional and global partners. Diplomatic engagements have influenced Iran's ability to negotiate trade agreements, secure foreign investment, and maintain access to international shipping routes (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). The importance of diplomacy in infrastructure development is evident in the country's approach to expanding its maritime facilities, particularly in the face of economic sanctions and geopolitical challenges (Gotteland, 2025). Iran's ports serve as vital gateways for its energy exports and industrial imports, making their development a key aspect of national economic planning (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Diplomatic relations with countries such as China, India, and Russia have played a defining role in advancing port expansion projects, ensuring connectivity with international markets and mitigating the impact of trade restrictions (Momeni & Larina, 2021). The evolving nature of Iran's foreign policy has directly influenced its capacity to attract international cooperation for maritime infrastructure projects, reflecting the interdependence between diplomacy and economic growth (Bilal et al., 2024).

Port engineering is a fundamental driver of economic development, as it enhances a nation's trade capacity, facilitates industrial growth, and fosters regional economic integration (Biswas, 2024). In Iran, investment in port infrastructure has been a priority for national development plans aimed at reducing dependency on oil revenues and diversifying the economy (Kwachuh, 2024). The strategic importance of Iran's ports is highlighted by their role in facilitating trade routes that connect Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (Rota, 2021). Engineering advancements in port construction and modernization have enabled the country to improve logistical efficiency, reduce transportation costs, and increase competitiveness in global markets (Williams & Otto, 2022). The development of ports such as Chabahar and Bandar Abbas has been central to Iran's strategy of expanding its trade corridors, particularly in light of

geopolitical shifts and evolving diplomatic engagements (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). The expansion of port facilities has not only strengthened Iran's position in regional trade networks but has also allowed it to attract foreign direct investment from countries seeking to enhance their access to key maritime trade routes (Jan et al., 2024). Given the dynamic nature of global trade, the success of port engineering initiatives is closely linked to diplomatic negotiations that determine access to financial resources, technology transfers, and long-term trade agreements (Sheikh, 2024).

This study seeks to examine the intersection of Iran's diplomatic strategies and the development of its port infrastructure, exploring how international engagements shape engineering projects and maritime expansion policies. The main research question investigates how diplomatic relations influence Iran's ability to develop and modernize its port facilities, particularly in the context of geopolitical tensions and economic sanctions (Minasyan, 2024). The study aims to analyze the impact of bilateral and multilateral agreements on Iran's maritime sector, assess the role of foreign investment in port development, and identify challenges and opportunities arising from Iran's diplomatic engagements.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employs a descriptive analysis method to examine Iran's diplomatic relations from the perspective of port engineering development. By synthesizing relevant literature and policy documents, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how diplomatic engagements influence the advancement of Iran's maritime infrastructure. Given the complexity of international relations and engineering projects, the study integrates insights from political science, economics, and civil engineering to assess Iran's strategic positioning in maritime trade. The analysis focuses on scholarly articles, government reports, international agreements, and expert opinions published between 2021 and 2025 to ensure the inclusion of the most recent developments and policy shifts.

The study follows a qualitative research design based on a systematic narrative review. A descriptive approach is chosen to explore the intricate relationship between diplomatic negotiations and engineering advancements in Iran's port infrastructure. The scope of this research

encompasses Iran's major port projects, including Chabahar, Bandar Abbas, and other strategic maritime locations, while also considering regional and global diplomatic engagements that have impacted their development. This review also examines the role of economic corridors, such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and China's Belt and Road Initiative, in shaping Iran's port engineering strategies.

Data for this study is gathered from peer-reviewed journal articles, official government statements, international trade agreements, and engineering reports published between 2021 and 2025. The primary sources include academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, along with reports from international organizations like the International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Bank. Additionally, policy briefs and economic reports from Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development and the Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran are analyzed to provide context for engineering projects and their diplomatic dimensions. Selection criteria prioritize articles that focus on Iran's port development, international trade policies, economic diplomacy, and geopolitical influences on maritime infrastructure. Studies that specifically examine Iran's role in regional trade networks, sanctions impact, and foreign investment in port engineering are included to ensure a comprehensive evaluation.

A qualitative content analysis approach is applied to systematically interpret the collected literature. The study categorizes data into key themes, including the impact of diplomatic agreements on port engineering, geopolitical constraints, foreign investment trends, and the role of international institutions in shaping Iran's maritime strategies. Comparative analysis is conducted to examine Iran's diplomatic initiatives relative to other nations with similar port development trajectories, allowing for a deeper understanding of how Iran leverages diplomacy to advance engineering projects despite economic and political challenges. Thematic coding is utilized to identify recurring patterns in government policies, foreign trade agreements, and maritime infrastructure investment. Additionally, engineering reports are reviewed to evaluate technical and logistical constraints associated with port expansion

projects in Iran. By integrating diplomatic and engineering perspectives, the study aims to bridge the gap between political strategy and infrastructure development, providing a nuanced assessment of Iran's maritime ambitions.

3. Theoretical Framework

Iran's diplomatic strategies in port engineering development can be analyzed through the lens of several international relations theories, each providing a distinct perspective on how the country navigates geopolitical constraints, trade partnerships, and infrastructure expansion. Realism, as one of the dominant theories in international relations, emphasizes the role of power and national interest in shaping foreign policy. Iran's approach to maritime diplomacy reflects a realist perspective in its efforts to counterbalance regional and global pressures by leveraging strategic alliances and port development projects (Gotteland, 2025). The realist view explains Iran's investment in port infrastructure as a means to secure economic self-sufficiency and mitigate the impact of economic sanctions imposed by Western nations (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). Iran's engagement with regional partners such as China, Russia, and India further aligns with realism, as these partnerships serve to strengthen its geopolitical position while reducing dependence on Western-controlled trade networks (Biswas, 2024).

Liberal institutionalism, in contrast, argues that states can achieve mutual benefits through cooperation, trade, and institutional engagement. Iran's diplomatic efforts in maritime trade agreements, participation in regional economic organizations, and engagement in global transport initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) illustrate its reliance on liberal institutionalist strategies (Momeni & Larina, 2021). By developing cooperative ties with key economic powers, Iran seeks to integrate its port infrastructure into global trade corridors, ensuring economic resilience despite ongoing political tensions (Kwachuh, 2024). The liberal institutionalist approach also highlights Iran's participation in international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Economic Cooperation Organization, where diplomatic engagement fosters access to foreign investment and engineering expertise for port development (Sheikh, 2024).

Another relevant theoretical framework is dependency theory, which examines the structural inequalities in global trade and economic systems. Iran's historical dependence on oil exports and vulnerability to foreign-imposed trade restrictions exemplifies the core-periphery relationship described in dependency theory (Hussain, 2024). However, through strategic investment in port engineering, Iran has sought to challenge this dependency by diversifying its economy and increasing its role as a regional trade hub (Jan et al., 2024). The development of ports such as Chabahar serves as a means to reduce reliance on external actors by facilitating direct trade routes and enhancing regional connectivity (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Iran's diplomatic strategies in port infrastructure development align with the dependency theory's premise that peripheral nations must pursue self-sufficiency and regional integration to counteract external economic pressures (Plieva et al., 2022).

The study of infrastructure development theories further elucidates Iran's maritime policies, as systems theory and growth pole theory offer valuable insights into the economic rationale behind port expansion. Systems theory views infrastructure as part of an interconnected economic system, where the development of one sector stimulates growth in others. Iran's maritime infrastructure is not an isolated endeavor but a key component of broader economic planning, where ports function as nodes in global and regional trade networks (Triantama, 2023). Systems theory helps explain why Iran has prioritized port engineering alongside railway expansion and industrial zone development, creating a comprehensive transport and logistics network to support economic resilience (Minasyan, 2024).

Growth pole theory, introduced by François Perroux, suggests that economic development is concentrated around strategic locations that serve as hubs for industrialization and trade. Iran's focus on developing Chabahar as a major economic hub aligns with this theory, as it aims to attract investment, facilitate trade, and create employment opportunities (Allamyradov, 2022). By strategically positioning its ports within global trade corridors, Iran aims to maximize economic spillover effects, integrating local industries into international supply chains and attracting foreign direct investment (Kolçak, 2024).

The concept of economic diplomacy bridges international relations theories with infrastructure development strategies, highlighting how diplomatic negotiations influence investment flows and trade agreements. Economic diplomacy involves leveraging foreign relations to facilitate economic growth, and Iran has actively engaged in diplomatic negotiations to secure funding and technological expertise for port development (Fedorovskaya, 2022). For instance, its strategic partnership with India in the Chabahar port project reflects the intersection of diplomacy and economic planning, where infrastructure development is used as a tool for strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing trade capacity (Biswas, 2024).

In the context of port engineering and trade corridors, theories of global value chains (GVCs) and network economics provide further analytical depth. GVC theory explains how Iran's ports function within broader production and trade networks, where efficient maritime infrastructure enhances the country's integration into international markets (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). The efficiency of Iran's ports determines its competitiveness in global trade, influencing decisions related to foreign investment, logistics, and industrial development (Williams & Otto, 2022). Meanwhile, network economics highlights the importance of connectivity in maritime trade, emphasizing that Iran's ability to establish direct shipping routes and reduce reliance on intermediary ports enhances its economic sovereignty (Jalolidinug'li, 2022).

Iran's engagement with regional trade corridors further demonstrates the application of these theories in practice. The INSTC, which connects Iran to Russia and Europe, illustrates the strategic use of maritime infrastructure to enhance economic and geopolitical influence (Kliuchnyk, 2023). Similarly, Iran's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative reflects a calculated effort to integrate its port infrastructure into a larger framework of global trade (Güngörürler, 2024). These trade corridors reinforce Iran's strategic importance in global logistics, underscoring the role of port engineering in strengthening diplomatic relations and trade partnerships (Rota, 2021).

The interplay between diplomacy, infrastructure development, and economic strategy is also evident in Iran's negotiations over sanctions and trade restrictions.

The ability to attract investment for port engineering projects despite economic sanctions highlights the resilience of Iran's economic diplomacy (Bilal et al., 2024). Iran's engagement in alternative trade agreements, barter deals, and regional coalitions demonstrates how economic diplomacy compensates for constraints imposed by external political pressures (Khasanov, 2023). By diversifying its diplomatic engagements, Iran reduces vulnerability to unilateral sanctions while maintaining access to critical trade routes and investment opportunities (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023).

From a strategic planning perspective, maritime geopolitics offers an additional theoretical lens for understanding Iran's port development policies. Maritime geopolitics examines how nations use their naval infrastructure to project economic and strategic influence. Iran's control over key maritime chokepoints, such as the Strait of Hormuz, underscores the geopolitical significance of its port infrastructure (Fedorovskaya, 2022). The ability to control vital shipping lanes not only enhances Iran's bargaining power in international trade negotiations but also serves as a deterrent against external economic pressures (Sheikh, 2024).

Ultimately, the theoretical framework underpinning this study illustrates the complex interplay between diplomacy, infrastructure development, and economic strategy in Iran's maritime policies. Realism explains Iran's efforts to strengthen its economic sovereignty through strategic alliances, while liberal institutionalism highlights its engagement in cooperative economic agreements (Kwachuh, 2024). Dependency theory provides insight into Iran's efforts to overcome structural trade inequalities, while infrastructure development theories explain the economic rationale behind port expansion (Gotteland, 2025). Trade corridor theories and network economics further illustrate how Iran integrates its ports into global logistics networks, reinforcing the link between port engineering and economic diplomacy (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021).

4. Literature Review

Existing studies on Iran's diplomatic relations and port development emphasize the critical role of international partnerships in shaping the country's maritime infrastructure. Research highlights that Iran's strategic

location has historically positioned it as a key player in regional and global trade networks (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Diplomatic engagements have significantly influenced Iran's ability to attract investment for port development, with agreements involving India, China, and Russia playing a crucial role in advancing maritime expansion projects (Biswas, 2024). Scholars argue that Iran's diplomatic approach to port development is shaped by geopolitical considerations, economic necessity, and strategic positioning within global trade routes (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). The expansion of Chabahar port, for example, has been linked to India's broader strategic interests in bypassing Pakistan and gaining direct access to Central Asian markets (Jan et al., 2024). Similarly, Iran's engagement with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has facilitated port modernization efforts while reinforcing Tehran's economic ties with Beijing (Momeni & Larina, 2021). Studies examining Iran's maritime infrastructure emphasize that international sanctions have posed significant challenges to port expansion efforts (Bilal et al., 2024). Restrictions on financial transactions and foreign investment have led Iran to seek alternative partnerships, with non-Western economic powers becoming primary stakeholders in its maritime strategy (Gotteland, 2025). Research indicates that Iran has successfully leveraged its diplomatic relations to maintain its role in regional trade, despite economic pressures (Fedorovskaya, 2022). Scholars also point out that Iran's diplomatic ties with neighboring countries such as Iraq, Turkmenistan, and the Gulf states have influenced port utilization and trade logistics (Allamyradov, 2022). However, the degree to which diplomatic relations translate into tangible port development outcomes varies based on political stability and economic conditions in partner countries (Kwachuh, 2024).

Global experiences provide valuable insights into how diplomatic relations have influenced port infrastructure projects in other countries, offering comparative perspectives on Iran's maritime strategy. Research on China's port expansion under the BRI demonstrates the effectiveness of strategic diplomacy in securing large-scale infrastructure investments (Sheikh, 2024). Chinese-funded port projects in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East illustrate how diplomatic negotiations shape trade corridors and enhance regional economic

integration (Triantama, 2023). Similarly, studies on European port development highlight the role of the European Union's trade policies in facilitating infrastructure projects through multilateral cooperation (Kliuchnyk, 2023). The experience of the Gwadar port in Pakistan, which has been largely funded by Chinese investments, offers a relevant case for comparison, as it illustrates how diplomatic alignment with a global power can transform regional trade dynamics (Jan et al., 2024). Research on historical and contemporary agreements impacting Iran's port expansion underscores the long-standing role of diplomatic engagement in shaping maritime infrastructure. Historical records indicate that Iran's port development initiatives date back to the Safavid era, when trade agreements with European nations facilitated the expansion of maritime routes (Rota, 2021). More recently, agreements with India on the development of Chabahar port have been examined as a case study in economic diplomacy (Biswas, 2024). Scholars argue that the Chabahar agreement represents a strategic counterbalance to China's involvement in Gwadar, highlighting the geopolitical underpinnings of port development (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Additionally, Iran's agreements with Russia on Caspian Sea trade corridors reflect diplomatic efforts to enhance connectivity with Eurasian markets (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023).

Contemporary studies also emphasize Iran's efforts to negotiate infrastructure agreements with regional partners to circumvent economic sanctions (Plieva et al., 2022). Research highlights how barter agreements and alternative trade mechanisms have facilitated port expansion despite financial restrictions (Güngörürler, 2024). The impact of sanctions on Iran's maritime trade has been widely analyzed, with findings indicating that diplomatic engagement with emerging economies has been instrumental in maintaining trade volume and securing investment for port engineering projects (Bilal et al., 2024). Scholars further examine the role of the INSTC in providing Iran with an alternative trade route that reduces dependency on the Suez Canal, thereby enhancing strategic autonomy in maritime logistics (Minasyan, 2024).

The assessment of regional and international actors in Iran's port development highlights the influence of global trade policies, investment flows, and diplomatic alignments. China's Belt and Road Initiative has been a

significant driver of Iran's port modernization, with Beijing's infrastructure investments facilitating connectivity between Iranian ports and major trade hubs (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). The strategic partnership between Iran and China has resulted in agreements that prioritize infrastructure funding and technology transfers, reinforcing Tehran's economic ties with Beijing (Khasanov, 2023). However, scholars note that Iran's relationship with China is shaped by broader geopolitical considerations, particularly in the context of US-China trade tensions (Fedorovskaya, 2022).

The role of Persian Gulf states in Iran's port development is also a subject of extensive research. Studies indicate that while Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have historically maintained economic competition with Iran, recent diplomatic engagements have opened opportunities for trade collaboration (Hussain, 2024). The normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, for instance, has been examined as a factor influencing regional trade patterns and maritime logistics (Bilal et al., 2024). Scholars suggest that improved diplomatic ties could lead to cooperative port agreements that enhance economic integration within the Gulf region (Allamyradov, 2022). However, the potential for sustained economic cooperation remains contingent on political stability and security considerations (Jalolidinug'li, 2022).

The European Union's policies on trade and sanctions have played a pivotal role in shaping Iran's port expansion efforts. Research highlights that while EU trade agreements have historically facilitated maritime investment, recent sanctions have limited Iran's access to European financial resources and engineering expertise (Kliuchnyk, 2023). Nevertheless, scholars argue that Iran has actively pursued diplomatic engagements with individual European states to secure infrastructure partnerships outside the scope of broader EU restrictions (Sheikh, 2024). Studies indicate that Iran's engagement with countries such as France, Germany, and Italy has provided limited opportunities for port investment, despite broader diplomatic challenges (Kolçak, 2024).

Recent studies have also examined the role of multilateral institutions in shaping Iran's maritime diplomacy. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have been analyzed as key actors

influencing port development policies (Williams & Otto, 2022). Scholars highlight that Iran's participation in global maritime organizations provides a diplomatic platform to advocate for trade facilitation measures and investment opportunities (Triantama, 2023). Research further explores Iran's involvement in regional economic organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), emphasizing how multilateral diplomacy enhances maritime trade prospects (Kwachuh, 2024).

In summary, the existing literature provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Iran's diplomatic strategies and port development. Studies highlight that diplomatic engagements with China, India, and Russia have been instrumental in advancing maritime infrastructure projects (Biswas, 2024). Comparative analyses of global port development experiences underscore the significance of diplomatic alignment in securing infrastructure investment (Jan et al., 2024). Historical and contemporary agreements demonstrate the long-standing role of diplomacy in shaping Iran's maritime policies, while assessments of regional and international actors reveal the geopolitical complexities influencing port expansion (Momeni & Larina, 2021).

5. Iran's Port Engineering Development: A Diplomatic Perspective

Iran's port engineering development has been shaped by a complex interplay of diplomatic engagements, economic strategy, and geopolitical realities. As a country with a critical geographic position at the crossroads of global trade routes, Iran has long prioritized port infrastructure as a key driver of economic expansion. Major ports such as Chabahar and Bandar Abbas have played central roles in Iran's maritime trade strategy, with diplomatic agreements influencing their development, expansion, and operational effectiveness (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). While Iran has leveraged bilateral and multilateral agreements to secure investments and technical expertise, geopolitical conflicts and economic sanctions have posed significant challenges to sustained infrastructure growth (Bilal et al., 2024). The development of Iran's ports highlights how diplomatic negotiations shape national infrastructure, revealing both the potential for economic integration and the

constraints imposed by international politics (Güngörürler, 2024).

Iran's major port development projects reflect a strategic effort to enhance its position in global trade networks. Chabahar port, one of the most significant infrastructure projects, has been at the center of Iran's diplomatic engagements, particularly with India. The development of Chabahar has provided India with direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan's Gwadar port, which is heavily influenced by China's Belt and Road Initiative (Biswas, 2024). This project has been instrumental in strengthening Iran-India ties, with diplomatic agreements facilitating investment in port engineering and logistical infrastructure (Jan et al., 2024). Despite its strategic importance, the full realization of Chabahar's potential has been hindered by US sanctions, limiting Iran's ability to attract further investment and modernize port facilities (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023).

Bandar Abbas, Iran's largest and most commercially active port, has also been at the heart of diplomatic negotiations. As a key transit hub for energy exports and containerized trade, Bandar Abbas has benefited from infrastructure agreements with regional and international partners (Momeni & Larina, 2021). Iran's engagement with China has facilitated the modernization of port facilities, with Beijing's investments aimed at integrating Iran into the broader BRI trade network (Minasyan, 2024). The expansion of Bandar Abbas has been a major component of Iran's strategy to diversify trade routes and reduce dependency on Persian Gulf transit chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). However, geopolitical tensions in the region, including conflicts between the US and Iran, have created uncertainty over future investment and trade stability (Gotteland, 2025).

Bilateral and multilateral diplomatic agreements have played a pivotal role in shaping Iran's port infrastructure development. Iran's participation in regional trade corridors such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) has underscored the importance of diplomatic cooperation in advancing maritime infrastructure. The INSTC, a multimodal trade corridor connecting Iran with Russia, India, and Central Asia, has led to significant port investments, particularly in the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf (Kliuchnyk,

2023). Agreements under the INSTC framework have facilitated engineering improvements in Iran's northern ports, enhancing connectivity with Russian and Eurasian markets (Fedorovskaya, 2022).

Iran's strategic cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further shaped port development policies. The 25-year Iran-China strategic agreement has included provisions for maritime infrastructure investments, with Chinese companies involved in the modernization of key Iranian ports (Plieva et al., 2022). China's financial and technical contributions have enabled Iran to develop container terminals and improve logistics efficiency, aligning Iranian port infrastructure with broader global trade networks (Triantama, 2023). Despite these advancements, concerns over dependency on Chinese investment have been raised, with some analysts warning of economic overreliance on Beijing (Sheikh, 2024).

Iran's engagement with European partners has yielded mixed results in terms of port development. While European companies have historically invested in Iran's maritime sector, the re-imposition of US sanctions following the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) disrupted ongoing infrastructure projects (Kwachuh, 2024). France, Germany, and Italy had previously been involved in maritime engineering initiatives, particularly in technology transfers for port automation and logistics efficiency (Williams & Otto, 2022). However, diplomatic uncertainty and banking restrictions have hindered further cooperation, limiting Iran's ability to benefit from European expertise (Rota, 2021).

Case studies of successful and failed negotiations provide insights into the complexities of Iran's diplomatic engagements in port engineering. The Chabahar agreement between Iran and India serves as a prime example of a partially successful diplomatic initiative. While India has invested in port expansion and logistical infrastructure, delays in financing and geopolitical uncertainties have prevented full-scale implementation (Biswas, 2024). The project's significance in bypassing Pakistan and providing access to Afghanistan has driven continued diplomatic engagement, but the impact of secondary US sanctions has created obstacles for sustained investment (Jan et al., 2024).

In contrast, Iran's negotiations with the European Union for port development have largely failed to materialize due to political instability and economic restrictions. European maritime companies, including those involved in logistics and shipbuilding, had expressed interest in Iranian port projects following the signing of the JCPOA (Kliuchnyk, 2023). However, the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and subsequent sanctions led to the cancellation of infrastructure agreements, illustrating the fragility of diplomatic negotiations in the face of geopolitical tensions (Bilal et al., 2024).

The influence of sanctions and geopolitical conflicts on Iran's port projects has been a defining factor in shaping infrastructure development strategies. US sanctions have restricted Iran's access to international financial markets, limiting investment in port modernization and technology upgrades (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). Restrictions on maritime insurance and shipping finance have further complicated Iran's ability to attract foreign investors, forcing the country to rely on alternative financial mechanisms such as barter agreements and regional trade partnerships (Allamyradov, 2022).

Geopolitical conflicts, particularly tensions with the US and regional rivals, have created security risks for Iran's maritime trade. The Persian Gulf's strategic importance has made Iran's ports vulnerable to disruptions caused by military confrontations, trade embargoes, and regional instability (Hussain, 2024). The impact of these conflicts on shipping routes and port security has been a significant challenge for Iran's diplomatic strategy, requiring continuous engagement with regional actors to ensure trade stability (Güngörürler, 2024).

Despite these challenges, Iran has pursued diplomatic strategies to maintain port development momentum. Strengthening ties with Russia, expanding trade corridors with Central Asian nations, and deepening economic relations with China have allowed Iran to continue investing in port infrastructure (Minasyan, 2024). Iran's ability to navigate diplomatic obstacles and secure alternative trade routes reflects its resilience in maintaining economic connectivity despite external pressures (Fedorovskaya, 2022).

In conclusion, Iran's port engineering development is deeply interconnected with its diplomatic strategies. Major port projects such as Chabahar and Bandar Abbas highlight the role of international partnerships in infrastructure expansion, while bilateral and multilateral

agreements have provided crucial financial and technical support (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). The successes and failures of diplomatic negotiations illustrate the impact of geopolitical dynamics on port investment, with sanctions and regional conflicts shaping Iran's ability to attract foreign participation (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). As Iran continues to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes, the future of its port infrastructure will depend on its ability to balance economic alliances, political stability, and technological advancement in maritime trade (Gotteland, 2025).

6. Iran's Strategic Alliances in Maritime Trade

Iran's maritime trade partnerships have played a critical role in shaping its economic strategy, with agreements involving China, India, and Russia forming the backbone of its trade infrastructure. As a country heavily reliant on maritime trade, Iran has strategically aligned itself with key economic powers to mitigate the effects of sanctions and enhance its position in global trade networks (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). Diplomatic engagements with these nations have facilitated port development, expanded shipping routes, and strengthened Iran's role in regional trade corridors. The Iran-China partnership is particularly significant, as Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has provided a framework for increased economic cooperation. The 25-year strategic agreement between Iran and China includes substantial infrastructure investments, with a strong focus on the modernization of Iranian ports and maritime logistics (Plieva et al., 2022). China's role in financing and engineering port development has been crucial, ensuring Iran's connectivity to global shipping lanes despite geopolitical tensions (Minasyan, 2024).

India has also been a key partner in Iran's maritime trade, particularly through the Chabahar port agreement, which serves as a gateway for Indian goods to Central Asia and Afghanistan. India's involvement in Chabahar is driven by its strategic need to bypass Pakistan and establish an alternative trade corridor to reach landlocked markets (Biswas, 2024). Diplomatic negotiations between Tehran and New Delhi have resulted in multiple investment commitments, including port upgrades, rail connectivity, and logistical infrastructure (Jan et al., 2024). However, US sanctions have repeatedly delayed India's ability to fully operationalize its investments, illustrating the

limitations of diplomatic agreements in the face of external economic pressures (Momeni & Larina, 2021). Despite these challenges, India's continued engagement with Iran underscores the mutual benefits of maritime cooperation, reinforcing both countries' trade objectives and regional influence (Güngörürler, 2024).

Russia has emerged as another crucial maritime partner for Iran, particularly through Caspian Sea trade corridors and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The INSTC is a multi-modal trade route that connects Iran, Russia, and India, offering an alternative to traditional maritime routes through the Suez Canal (Kliuchnyk, 2023). Iran's ports in the Caspian region, including Bandar Anzali and Amirabad, serve as vital links in this trade network, facilitating the movement of goods between the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus, and Russia (Fedorovskaya, 2022). Iran's diplomatic engagements with Russia have not only strengthened economic ties but have also expanded strategic cooperation in maritime security and energy transportation (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). The deepening Iran-Russia partnership has been particularly important in countering Western economic restrictions, allowing both nations to develop alternative financial mechanisms for trade (Bilal et al., 2024).

Beyond bilateral agreements, Iran's participation in regional cooperation organizations has reinforced its maritime trade strategy. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which includes Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Central Asian nations, has provided a platform for expanding trade connectivity through port and shipping agreements (Sheikh, 2024). Iran's ports serve as critical transit points for ECO member states, enabling access to international markets and reducing dependence on external trade routes (Kwachuh, 2024). The ECO's Trans-Asian Railway and Trade Facilitation Agreement have further strengthened Iran's maritime positioning, enhancing trade volume and investment opportunities (Triantama, 2023).

Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has also had significant implications for its maritime trade policies. As a full member of the SCO, Iran has expanded its economic partnerships with China, Russia, India, and Central Asian nations, leveraging the organization's trade initiatives to advance port development (Hussain, 2024). The SCO's commitment to regional connectivity aligns with Iran's

maritime ambitions, facilitating joint infrastructure projects and securing investment for port expansion (Allamyradov, 2022). Additionally, the SCO provides a diplomatic framework for Iran to negotiate trade agreements that bypass Western sanctions, reinforcing its role in alternative trade corridors (Jalolidinug'li, 2022).

Iran's diplomatic policies have been strategically aligned with global trade networks, ensuring its continued participation in international commerce despite geopolitical challenges. Iran has actively pursued trade diversification strategies, focusing on non-Western markets to reduce reliance on Europe and the US (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). The shift toward Asian and Eurasian trade partnerships reflects Iran's broader economic realignment, emphasizing connectivity through the BRI, INSTC, and the Caspian trade network (Fedorovskaya, 2022). These alignments have allowed Iran to integrate its ports into multi-regional trade agreements, securing long-term investment and expanding its logistical capabilities (Omid & Noolkar-Oak, 2021).

The impact of sanctions on Iran's maritime trade alliances has shaped its diplomatic policies, pushing the country to develop alternative financial mechanisms for sustaining economic engagement. Iran has implemented barter trade agreements, currency swap arrangements, and state-backed investment funds to counter the restrictions imposed by US and European sanctions (Khasanov, 2023). These measures have enabled Iran to continue maritime trade with strategic partners while minimizing exposure to international financial restrictions (Momeni & Larina, 2021). Additionally, Iran's efforts to establish joint maritime ventures with allied nations have enhanced its trade resilience, ensuring stable shipping and port operations (Williams & Otto, 2022).

Iran has also pursued technological partnerships in maritime trade, engaging with Chinese, Russian, and Indian engineering firms to modernize port infrastructure and enhance logistical efficiency (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). Investments in port automation, digital trade facilitation, and advanced cargo handling technologies have strengthened Iran's competitive position in global shipping (Kolçak, 2024). These efforts are aligned with broader global trade trends, where maritime digitalization is a key factor in improving

efficiency and reducing operational costs (Gotteland, 2025).

Despite these strategic alliances, Iran faces ongoing challenges in securing long-term trade stability, particularly in the face of regional conflicts and shifting diplomatic landscapes (Bilal et al., 2024). Tensions in the Persian Gulf, political instability in Afghanistan, and evolving trade policies in China and India have created uncertainties in Iran's maritime partnerships (Güngörürler, 2024). However, Iran has demonstrated diplomatic adaptability, continuously negotiating new agreements and expanding its maritime trade network to counteract external pressures (Kliuchnyk, 2023).

In conclusion, Iran's strategic alliances in maritime trade have been shaped by a combination of bilateral agreements, regional cooperation, and global trade realignment. Partnerships with China, India, and Russia have reinforced Iran's maritime infrastructure, securing investment and trade diversification opportunities (Fedorovskaya, 2022). Participation in regional organizations such as the ECO and SCO has further strengthened Iran's economic positioning, ensuring long-term trade connectivity (Sheikh, 2024). By aligning its diplomatic policies with global trade networks, Iran has successfully navigated geopolitical constraints, leveraging strategic partnerships to sustain economic growth (Plieva et al., 2022). The resilience of Iran's maritime trade strategy highlights its ability to adapt to changing international dynamics, ensuring continued engagement in global commerce despite external challenges (Omid & Noolkar-Oak, 2021).

7. Challenges and Opportunities in Port Engineering Development

Iran's port engineering development faces a range of technical, economic, and diplomatic challenges, yet it also presents significant opportunities for infrastructure expansion and trade enhancement. As a country with a strategic maritime position, Iran has sought to modernize its port facilities to strengthen regional connectivity and global trade competitiveness. However, constraints related to engineering limitations, financial resources, and political dynamics have influenced the pace and effectiveness of port development (Omid & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Despite these barriers, diplomatic engagements and strategic alliances offer Iran opportunities to leverage infrastructure investment and

improve trade routes, ensuring long-term economic benefits (Momeni & Larina, 2021).

One of the primary technical and engineering challenges in Iran's port development relates to the modernization of port infrastructure. Many of Iran's major ports, including Bandar Abbas and Chabahar, require deep-water expansion, advanced cargo-handling facilities, and improved logistical networks to remain competitive with regional hubs such as Dubai's Jebel Ali Port (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). The lack of state-of-the-art port automation has limited Iran's ability to handle large container volumes efficiently, creating bottlenecks in trade operations (Bilal et al., 2024). Additionally, aging port equipment and outdated dredging technologies have hindered the expansion of port capacity, affecting Iran's competitiveness in international shipping (Güngörürler, 2024).

Another major technical issue is maritime security and navigation efficiency. Given Iran's geographical position along critical shipping routes, port security measures and navigation technologies must be enhanced to comply with international maritime safety standards (Fedorovskaya, 2022). The need for advanced tracking systems, digitalization of shipping processes, and integration of smart port technologies has been widely recognized as essential for improving Iran's maritime operations (Williams & Otto, 2022). However, technological restrictions imposed by sanctions have limited Iran's access to advanced engineering solutions, slowing the adoption of digital port management systems (Plieva et al., 2022).

Iran's port engineering development is also constrained by economic and financial obstacles, particularly funding constraints and barriers to foreign investment. The high cost of port expansion projects requires substantial financial commitments, which have been difficult to secure due to sanctions, currency instability, and restrictions on international banking transactions (Kwachuh, 2024). Iran's reliance on state funding for infrastructure projects has placed additional pressure on national budgets, especially given the economic downturn caused by fluctuations in oil revenues (Gotteland, 2025).

Foreign investment has traditionally been a key driver of port infrastructure growth, but Western sanctions have severely limited Iran's ability to attract international investors (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). European

engineering firms and shipping companies, which had previously shown interest in collaborating on port expansion projects, have withdrawn due to compliance concerns with US and EU regulations (Kolçak, 2024). The withdrawal of major global investors has left Iran dependent on regional partners such as China, India, and Russia for infrastructure financing (Minasyan, 2024). Despite these financial barriers, Iran has pursued alternative funding mechanisms, including state-backed investment funds, barter trade agreements, and currency swap arrangements to sustain port development (Hussain, 2024). The Iran-China 25-year strategic agreement, which includes provisions for port modernization, has provided some financial relief, though concerns remain regarding the long-term economic dependency on Chinese capital (Fedorovskaya, 2022).

Diplomatic challenges, including political tensions and trade restrictions, have further complicated Iran's port expansion efforts. US-led sanctions on Iran's maritime sector have restricted access to global shipping insurance, financial institutions, and technology providers (Allamyradov, 2022). These sanctions have led to higher operational costs for Iranian ports, making them less attractive to international shipping companies (Khasanov, 2023). Furthermore, the political instability in the Persian Gulf has affected trade confidence, as periodic military tensions have disrupted shipping routes (Biswas, 2024).

Another significant diplomatic challenge is Iran's strained relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which have historically limited regional trade collaboration (Jalolidinug'li, 2022). The longstanding rivalry with Saudi Arabia has impacted economic partnerships that could otherwise have strengthened maritime trade networks (Sheikh, 2024). However, recent diplomatic shifts, including the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, offer potential for future cooperation in maritime trade (Bilal et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, Iran has opportunities to leverage diplomacy to enhance port infrastructure and trade routes. One key opportunity lies in strengthening partnerships with regional economic organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Triantama, 2023). These organizations provide platforms for Iran to

secure infrastructure investment and trade agreements that bypass Western restrictions (Kwachuh, 2024). Iran's participation in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) represents another major opportunity to expand maritime trade and secure infrastructure financing (Kliuchnyk, 2023). The INSTC, which connects Iran with Russia, India, and Central Asia, has facilitated investment in Iranian port facilities, ensuring their integration into global trade corridors (Fedorovskaya, 2022). By deepening economic cooperation with Russia and India, Iran can further develop its Caspian Sea ports and improve connectivity with Eurasian markets (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Additionally, Iran's growing ties with China through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provide opportunities for long-term investment in port development (Plieva et al., 2022). China's commitment to financing strategic infrastructure projects aligns with Iran's goals of modernizing port facilities and expanding trade routes (Güngörürler, 2024). However, Iran must carefully navigate its relationship with China to avoid over-reliance on a single economic partner, ensuring a balanced and diversified diplomatic strategy (Momeni & Larina, 2021). Another potential avenue for enhancing Iran's port infrastructure lies in advancing technological innovation in port management. Iranian engineering firms have begun developing indigenous smart port solutions, reducing reliance on foreign technology providers (Zahra & Burhanuddin, 2024). By investing in domestic maritime research and technology development, Iran can modernize its ports without being constrained by external sanctions (Gotteland, 2025). Furthermore, Iran can explore diplomatic negotiations with emerging markets in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia to expand trade partnerships and attract investment in port projects (Beznosova & Likhachev, 2023). Iran's strategic outreach to African nations, particularly in oil trade and port logistics, provides an emerging avenue for economic growth (Sheikh, 2024). In conclusion, Iran's port engineering development is shaped by a combination of technical, financial, and diplomatic challenges, yet significant opportunities exist to enhance its maritime trade infrastructure. Engineering constraints, economic sanctions, and geopolitical instability have limited Iran's ability to modernize its ports, but strategic diplomatic

engagements and trade partnerships offer pathways for overcoming these barriers (Minasyan, 2024). By leveraging regional alliances, securing alternative funding sources, and investing in technological innovation, Iran can strengthen its port infrastructure and enhance its role in global trade networks (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). The resilience of Iran's maritime strategy highlights its capacity to adapt to evolving geopolitical realities, ensuring continued economic integration despite external pressures (Kliuchnyk, 2023).

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study illustrate how Iran's port engineering development is deeply intertwined with its diplomatic strategies, revealing the broader implications of international relations theories on maritime infrastructure. Realism, liberal institutionalism, and dependency theory provide a useful framework for understanding how Iran navigates economic constraints and geopolitical pressures to sustain its port development efforts. The realist perspective is evident in Iran's strategic alliances with China, Russia, and India, where cooperation is driven by national interests and the need to counterbalance Western sanctions. Iran's engagement in bilateral agreements and regional trade corridors reflects the realist principle of self-reliance, as the country seeks to maintain economic sovereignty despite external economic restrictions.

Liberal institutionalism highlights Iran's diplomatic approach to integrating into multilateral trade organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Through these institutions, Iran has sought to facilitate investment, improve port logistics, and gain access to new markets, demonstrating how economic diplomacy can create opportunities even in politically constrained environments. By participating in initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Iran has adopted liberal institutionalist strategies to strengthen its maritime trade position while mitigating the risks associated with unilateral economic policies.

From the perspective of dependency theory, Iran's historical reliance on oil exports and its vulnerability to economic sanctions reflect the structural inequalities in

global trade. However, Iran's efforts to expand port infrastructure, diversify trade partners, and establish alternative financing mechanisms suggest a conscious attempt to reduce economic dependency on Western-controlled financial systems. By focusing on port modernization and trade diversification, Iran seeks to shift from a peripheral role in the global economy to a more strategically autonomous position, consistent with the arguments of dependency theorists who advocate for self-sufficiency and regional integration.

When comparing Iran's port diplomacy with other nations, several key differences emerge. Countries such as China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have successfully used port infrastructure as a diplomatic tool to expand economic influence, demonstrating how state-backed investment, strategic partnerships, and technological innovation can drive maritime trade growth. The UAE, for example, has transformed Jebel Ali Port into a major global hub by leveraging free trade agreements, foreign direct investment, and cutting-edge logistics technologies. In contrast, Iran's port development has been constrained by sanctions, political isolation, and limited access to global financial markets, requiring a more regionally focused approach to port diplomacy.

China's success in maritime expansion under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides another useful comparison. Unlike Iran, which has faced barriers to Western capital and technology, China has mobilized state-backed investment funds to develop world-class port infrastructure in strategic locations such as Gwadar (Pakistan) and Colombo (Sri Lanka). The Chinese model demonstrates the importance of long-term economic planning, diplomatic flexibility, and integration into global shipping networks, lessons that Iran can incorporate into its future port development policies. However, Iran's geopolitical tensions and economic restrictions present a unique set of challenges that differentiate its maritime diplomacy from that of other global players.

Iran's maritime diplomacy has broader implications for economic sustainability, particularly in ensuring long-term trade resilience and reducing dependency on oil revenues. By expanding port infrastructure and strengthening regional trade partnerships, Iran has positioned itself as a critical transit hub for international commerce. This shift aligns with broader economic

sustainability goals, as diversified trade routes reduce economic vulnerability and enhance long-term growth prospects. Furthermore, investments in port engineering and logistical efficiency contribute to employment generation, industrial expansion, and technological advancement, reinforcing the economic importance of maritime diplomacy in Iran's broader development strategy.

Iran's diplomatic approach to port engineering has been shaped by a combination of bilateral agreements, regional cooperation, and strategic partnerships. The development of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports illustrates how Iran has used diplomacy to attract investment and expand trade connectivity. Despite technical, financial, and geopolitical challenges, Iran has leveraged regional alliances and alternative financing mechanisms to sustain port development efforts. The influence of sanctions on Iran's maritime trade has led to the pursuit of new trade corridors with China, India, and Russia, demonstrating the country's ability to adapt to shifting global dynamics. Furthermore, Iran's engagement with multilateral organizations such as the SCO and ECO highlights the role of institutional diplomacy in securing investment for infrastructure growth.

To strengthen its maritime infrastructure, Iran should prioritize policy measures that enhance investment security, modernize port technology, and deepen regional economic cooperation. One key recommendation is to expand free trade zones around major ports, allowing for increased foreign direct investment and industrial development. By offering tax incentives, regulatory reforms, and investment protections, Iran can attract international shipping companies and logistics firms, fostering long-term growth in the maritime sector.

Another critical area of focus is technological advancement in port engineering and logistics management. Iran should invest in smart port solutions, automated cargo handling systems, and blockchain-based trade facilitation mechanisms to improve efficiency and competitiveness. Developing public-private partnerships with engineering firms from China, India, and Russia can facilitate knowledge transfer and accelerate the adoption of global best practices in port management.

Diplomatically, Iran should continue to strengthen economic ties with regional trade organizations, leveraging platforms such as the INSTC and BRI to secure long-term infrastructure investments. Expanding cooperation with African, Central Asian, and Southeast Asian markets can further diversify trade routes and reduce economic reliance on a limited number of partners.

Security considerations must also be addressed through maritime safety agreements and regional naval cooperation initiatives. Given the geopolitical tensions in the Persian Gulf, ensuring safe and stable shipping routes is essential for Iran's maritime trade expansion. Strengthening diplomatic negotiations with neighboring Gulf states can contribute to the stability of maritime corridors, reducing trade disruptions and enhancing investor confidence.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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