


Chapter 1

Rethinking Arab Supply Chains Strategies for Cooperation Resilience and Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores a new approach to supply chain management (SCM) in the Middle East, emphasizing cooperation among Arab countries instead of conflict. Despite the region's strategic position, supply chains remain fragmented, with low intra-Arab trade and high operational disruption costs. Quantitative data indicate that intra-GCC trade is growing, logistics performance is improving, and trade facilitation correlates with efficiency, yet regional integration remains limited. This research identifies mechanisms, policies, and frameworks, such as harmonized regulations, shared infrastructure, and digital trade platforms, that enhance resilience, sustainability, and middle competitiveness. Findings demonstrate that cooperative SCM reduces disruptions, lowers costs, and strengthens economic and institutional ties. Recommendations include expanding regional collaboration, standardizing procedures, and investing in shared logistics to transform fragmented networks into resilient, sustainable, and integrated supply chains across Arab Region.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Middle East has emerged as a critical hub for global trade and logistics, bridging Europe, Asia, and Africa. However, the region's potential remains constrained by persistent geopolitical tensions, fragmented markets, and underdeveloped collaborative mechanisms among neighboring countries. Supply chain management (SCM) in this context is often dominated by conflict-driven competition, rather than strategic cooperation, leading to inefficiencies, higher costs, and limited resilience in the face of crises such as pandemics, economic shocks, or natural disasters. The concept of cooperative supply chain management among Arab countries represents an innovative pathway toward enhancing economic integration, stability, and sustainability. This paper seeks to explore a new approach to SCM in the Middle East, emphasizing collaboration over conflict, and highlighting the economic, social, and environmental benefits of such an approach, while broadening the analytical lens beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to include non-GCC Arab countries and cross-country comparability (Awashreh, 2025a; PwC Middle East, 2025).

The research problem stems from the observation that most supply chain strategies in the Middle East are reactive and nationally isolated. While global supply chains increasingly emphasize resilience and sustainability, Middle Eastern countries often prioritize short-term national interests over regional integration. This lack of cooperation results in duplicated infrastructure, logistical bottlenecks, and missed opportunities for shared growth. For instance, ports in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states operate largely independently, despite proximity and overlapping trade routes. Similarly, intra-Arab trade is comparatively low, representing less than 10% of total trade volume for many countries, far below regional cooperation potential. These issues are exacerbated by political conflicts, regulatory disparities, inconsistent standards, and cultural and organizational barriers that hinder trust-building and long-term collaboration, which collectively undermine the efficiency, resilience, and sustainability of supply chains in the region (PwC Middle East, 2024; Bathaei, & Štreimikienė, 2024).

Supporting evidence for this research problem includes both economic and operational indicators. Studies indicate that supply chain disruptions cost Middle Eastern economies billions annually, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, oil and gas, and food security. Additionally, research in sustainable supply chain management emphasizes that collaborative frameworks, such as shared logistics, harmonized regulations, and joint investment in technology, can significantly reduce operational costs, carbon footprints, and risk exposure. Beyond macro-level trade statistics, qualitative evidence from policy reports and sectoral analyses highlights the importance of trust, governance alignment, and institutional capacity in enabling

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