

# Chapter 2

## Logistics Vulnerabilities in Conflict Zones: Insights From the MENA Region

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### ABSTRACT

*Conflict zones are at the crossroads of efficiency, humanitarian need, and geopolitical power, in which politics of access and chronic uncertainty reform flows in logistics and supply chains. Prolonged wars in Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Gaza have destroyed infrastructure, disintegrated power, and made logistics an instrument of power disputed in MENA. Chokepoint disruption at Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz disrupts routes, increases costs and emissions, compromising resilience on the global scale. This chapter maps six categories of vulnerabilities and makes the case using the SCOR model that conflict-sensitive adaptation and practical corridor, partnership, sanctions, and digital-visibility actions are needed.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The management of logistics and supply chains is critical in the complex intersection (Kovács & Spens, 2011; Jahre et al., 2019) of operational efficiency, humanitarian imperatives and geopolitical instability found in conflict zones. While classical supply chain design assumes reasonably predictable flow patterns (Ivanov, 2023), enforceable contracts, secure infrastructures and stable regulatory frameworks, these assumptions are severely undermined in environments where states are fragmented, armed groups proliferate and civilian infrastructure is targeted by hostilities. Where logistics functions are typically perceived as technical activities, in conflict, logistics also take on a political dimension as access corridors, transport fleets and warehouses are used as leverage and taxed, or blocked from use, by competing interests (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

The Middle East and North Africa region is a prime example (UNCTAD, 2024) of where the combination of both globally strategic trade routes and significant conflict offer unique opportunities to examine this complex relationship. Yemen's many civil wars, Syria's decade long civil unrest and pending transition, Libya's perennial state of dissolution and escalating incidents with Gaza all present unique stress tests on both commercial and humanitarian logistics networks. Collectively, these conflicts have led to widespread destruction of roadways, bridges, ports (UNCTAD, 2024; World Bank, 2024), fuel storage and storage facilities, in addition to displacing numerous skilled workers and disrupting local markets, thereby creating a decline in both capacity and reliability within logistics networks.

Logistical disruptions in the MENA region produce global effects that go beyond just humanitarian ones because they are closely linked to maritime chokepoints that play a significant role in international shipping. The Red Sea, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea form an essential shipping route, also referred to as the Red Sea/Suez Canal/Mediterranean Sea or RSA/SMS, which carries 10%-14% of all ocean-going shipping and approximately 30% of containerized goods (UNCTAD, 2024; World Bank, 2024). The increased focus on the RSA/SMS route has been due to threats posed by Iran through their involvement with multinational shipping activities and the recent attack by Houthi on a number of vessels within the Red Sea area. To avoid the ongoing threat, VASSER companies have begun rerouting their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2024); however, the cost increases, lead time increases, and GHG emissions will weaken the resilience and sustainability of global supply chains. The Strait of Hormuz is also another example of a region that presents similar threats with increased conflicts over TIME and ongoing tanker incidents, further disrupting approximately 20% to 30% of all crude oil transported globally (EIA, 2024).

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