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SUPPLEMENT

MIDDLE EAST

YOUR GUIDE TO THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL AIRFREIGHT INDUSTRY

BRUN: MIDDLE EASTERN AIR CARGO MARKET IS EVOLVING SIGNIFICANTLY

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION



Q & A WITH ANDY WATSON, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, UAE, KENYA & EGYPT, HAE



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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION



It only takes a glance at the world map to notice how important the Middle East's geographical position is to the global airfreight supply chain. Its importance springs from several key factors.

For instance, it is strategically positioned at the crossroads of major global trade routes connecting Asia, Europe and Africa. This central location enables efficient and cost-effective transportation of goods between these continents. For instance, Dubai, one of the region's primary air cargo hubs, is within an 8-hour flight to two-thirds of the world's population.

The region is home to some of the world's largest and most advanced air cargo hubs, such as Dubai International Airport (DXB) and Hamad International Airport (DOH) in Doha. These hubs serve as critical transshipment points for global air cargo, offering extensive connectivity and state-of-the-art facilities that handle significant cargo volumes efficiently.

The Middle East's role in global trade extends beyond air cargo. The region's economic activities, such as energy exports and increasing diversification into non-oil sectors, generate substantial cargo volumes that necessitate efficient logistics solutions. This economic dynamism further enhances the region's importance as a hub for global air cargo.

The region often serves as a reliable alternative when other global logistics routes face disruptions. For example, during disruptions in container shipping in the Red Sea, Middle Eastern hubs like Dubai saw significant increases in air cargo traffic as businesses sought reliable alternatives to sea freight.

These are some of the reasons that the region's air cargo market has been experiencing robust growth while playing a crucial role in global logistics due to its strategic location and significant investments in infrastructure. As well as millions of dollars in investments in the regional airfreight sector in the Middle East has seen substantial growth in demand. For instance, air cargo demand in January 2024 rose by 18.4% year-on-year, driven by the booming e-commerce sector and increasing international trade. This trend continued into February with an 11.9% increase in demand compared to the same period the previous year.

Dubai, of course, remains a pivotal hub for airfreight, particularly due to its strategic position connecting Asia, Europe and Africa. Recent data showed a significant increase in Dubai-Europe air cargo traffic, with a 146% rise in tonnage in February 2024 compared to the previous year. The growth in demand has been supported by an increase in available cargo capacity. In January 2024, the capacity measured in available cargo tonne-kilometres (ACTKs) increased by 14.6%, largely due to the rise in belly capacity from passenger aircraft returning to service.

While the sector is performing well, challenges such as economic uncertainties, particularly regarding China's economic slowdown, and political instability in certain regions remain concerns. However, the ongoing digitalisation, efforts to enhance efficiency, and sustainability initiatives are expected to support continued growth and resilience in the market.

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Erratum

In the last supplement, on pharmaceuticals, there was an inadvertent mention that referenced a co-operation agreement between CMA CGM Air Cargo and AFKLM Cargo in 2023. AFKLM Cargo has asked us to point out that this agreement is now concluded.

We are happy to acknowledge this error on our part and apologise to AFKLM Cargo for this confusion by erroneously entering this in the article.



BRUN: MIDDLE EASTERN AIRCARGO IS EVOLVING SIGNIFICANTLY

“New players are emerging, contributing to the region’s rapid development and transformation.”

In February 2024, Etihad Airways appointed Stanislas Brun as its new Vice President of Cargo, based at the carrier’s Abu Dhabi headquarters. Brun is responsible for overseeing commercial operations, including scheduled and charter flights, revenue management, and network planning. He reports directly to Etihad Airways’ chief operating officer, Mohammad Al Bulooki;

Before joining Etihad Cargo, he served as senior vice president of global airfreight at Geodis. Expressing his enthusiasm for his new role, Brun stated on his appointment that it was a privilege to take on the new challenge at Etihad Cargo.

Here in a major media interview, Brun talks airfreight matters with the ACW Middle East supplement.

The Middle Eastern airfreight sector is currently navigating several significant challenges despite an overall positive growth outlook. Do you agree with this opinion?

I agree with the opinion that the Middle Eastern airfreight sector is currently navigating several significant challenges despite an overall positive growth outlook. Over the last five years, the Middle East has experienced a lot of developments, with some companies showing strong growth while others face considerable headwinds. This period has also seen significant changes in management across major airlines in the region, marking a notable shift and a changing of the guard. Such extensive changes within a short timeframe in a region are quite unusual compared to the relative stability seen in other regions.

New players are emerging, contributing to the region’s rapid development and transformation. Government investments in these countries have further bolstered economic growth and development, leading to the establishment of new airlines and expansion of others with ambitious plans each year. These developments are not confined to the Middle East alone; we also observe airlines in India placing orders for new aircraft and targeting expansion, reflecting a broader trend. The Indian and Middle Eastern air cargo markets are evolving significantly to keep pace with their economic advancements, illustrating both the opportunities and challenges facing the sector.

It is reported by IATA that infrastructure at some airports in the region is struggling to keep pace with the growth in cargo volumes. This can lead to bottlenecks and delays. Do you agree with this observation?

Some airports in the Middle East are struggling to keep pace with the growth in cargo volumes, which can lead to bottlenecks and delays. However, there are notable exceptions, such as Abu Dhabi,

where significant efforts are being made to develop and enhance infrastructure. Abu Dhabi has demonstrated its capacity to manage challenging situations effectively. For example, during recent adverse weather events and heavy air traffic, Abu Dhabi Airport showcased its ability to handle such conditions efficiently. Despite these challenges, the airport maintained its operations efficiently, with the passenger terminal remaining open and flights from other airlines diverted to Zayed International Airport.

Etihad Cargo is collaborating closely with Abu Dhabi Airports on a master plan for a new cargo terminal, which is slated to open within the next two years. This initiative aims to create a state-of-the-art cargo terminal capable of meeting future demands. Current capabilities already allow e-commerce cargo arriving at Zayed International Airport to be cleared within 12 hours, and ongoing investments are set to support increasing air traffic. Abu Dhabi’s proactive approach, with a robust growth plan and space for expansion, ensures that it is well-prepared to handle increased cargo volumes without facing significant hurdles in the foreseeable future. This contrasts with other airports in the region that may not be as advanced in their infrastructure development, highlighting the varied capacity and preparedness across different Middle Eastern airports.

Etihad Airways management said that the airline has embarked on an exciting period of significant growth in its cargo operations in the UAE. Can you outline what sort of growth you are aiming for?

Etihad Cargo is embarking on a significant growth phase for its operations, driven by substantial investments and strategic initiatives. A key growth area is the pharmaceutical market where Etihad Cargo





AN AIR CARGO MARKET WANTLY



is developing pharma corridors with the support of Abu Dhabi's Department of Health, aligning with the vision of making Abu Dhabi a global healthcare hub. Following the successful launch of SecureTech, we are also developing our products further to ensure we are well-placed to meet our customers' requirements in the future.

Strategic partnerships, such as our collaboration with SF Airlines, have expanded Etihad Cargo's reach, increasing freighter services to the Chinese market. Etihad Cargo is also focused on enhancing value propositions through improved palletisation, advanced track and trace systems, and temperature-controlled solutions. Additionally, digital integration with customers' systems is being enhanced for seamless access to Etihad Cargo's capabilities. These initiatives collectively aim to strengthen Etihad Cargo's operational footprint, improve service quality, and position Abu Dhabi as a leading global logistics hub. Furthermore, Abu Dhabi is enhancing its infrastructure, including the recent launch of a new passenger terminal and an upcoming dedicated cargo terminal at Zayed International Airport.

How important was it for Etihad Cargo to sponsor MiPharma Global Conference this month? Are you proud to have had such a role?

Sponsoring the MiPharma Global Conference was another way for Etihad Cargo to demonstrate the importance of the industry to the region. Our PharmaLife product is a key focus area for us, emphasising our commitment to the pharmaceutical sector and aligning with Abu Dhabi's vision of becoming a global hub for healthcare and life sciences.

Hosting such an international event, sponsored by the Department of Culture & Tourism, in Abu Dhabi underscores the emirate's growing prominence on the global stage. We are proud to have played a significant role in this conference, showcasing our dedication to supporting and advancing the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry.

Do you utilise Road Feeder Services in the region?

Yes, we definitely utilise Road Feeder Services in the region. Etihad Cargo's network includes daily truck operations within the UAE, providing a 24/7 land bridge between Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, connecting various airports, and feeding cargo to and from our hub in Abu Dhabi. In partnership with Noatum Logistics, we operate 26 trucks daily, ensuring efficient cargo movement between airports. Additionally, we extend these services to other countries in the GCC, further enhancing our logistics capabilities and connectivity throughout the region.

How successful have the new temperature-controlled cool dollies added to EASC's Abu Dhabi fleet been?

The addition of new temperature-controlled cool dollies to Etihad

Cargo's Abu Dhabi fleet is extremely important for Etihad Cargo, providing extra measures to maintain product integrity especially in the summer months. Manufactured in partnership with Bombelli in Italy, these cool dollies have significantly enhanced our ability to maintain the temperature of sensitive cargo during transit, which is crucial for pharmaceutical manufacturers and other commodities like flowers and perishables. This innovation ensures temperature control on the apron, which is essential for handling such sensitive items. Following the implementation of these cool dollies, several pharmaceutical companies have expressed their commitment to further development with us.

Moreover, the inauguration of our state-of-the-art, CEIV Pharma-certified pharma hub in Abu Dhabi has reinforced our customers' confidence in our capabilities. These advancements highlight Etihad Cargo's dedication to supporting Abu Dhabi's vision of becoming a global hub for healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and life sciences.

To meet the increased demand for charter services due to a surge in e-commerce in the UAE, which has seen Etihad Cargo receive 35% more charter requests and operate 23% more charters in 2023 compared to the previous year, you have partnered with Awery. Is this e-commerce coming into the UAE or leaving the UAE?

We are seeing both — part of this cargo is in transit via the UAE, and the rest is destined for locations across the GCC. While there is notable growth in e-commerce directed towards destinations within the GCC due to the region's developing economies, the vast majority of this e-commerce cargo is in transit to other destinations in our global network. This highlights the UAE's strategic role as a key logistics hub in the region.

How significant is e-commerce traffic compared with 'traditional' cargo traffic?

E-commerce traffic is increasingly significant compared to traditional cargo traffic. It is a major driver of global cargo growth, gradually replacing some traditional retail channels. This shift is evident as general cargo volumes decrease globally while e-commerce continues to expand. However, e-commerce generates unbalanced flows, particularly outside of China and Hong Kong, leading to high outbound volumes with relatively low return loads. This dynamic highlights the growing importance of e-commerce in the cargo industry, although it also presents challenges in managing uneven traffic patterns.

What is the average age of cargo staff in the UAE? Do you have any significant number of female

“E-commerce traffic is increasingly significant compared to traditional cargo traffic”

**employees? How easy is it to get trained personnel at the moment?**

The average age of cargo staff in the UAE is 41. Etihad Cargo has a robust recruitment and development programme designed to attract young, tech-savvy talent to continue driving innovation and leveraging technology. Additionally, 30% of Etihad Cargo's operations and commercial teams are female, and 22% of the senior leadership team are women. The executive leadership team at Etihad Airways is committed to building a diverse, inclusive and equal organisation, as demonstrated by various support programmes. I firmly believe that gender balance in cargo is crucial, and despite traditional perceptions of the industry, we are seeing an increasing number of women in managerial roles across sectors such as revenue management, sales, customer service, and operations.

Securing trained personnel is currently not a challenge for Etihad Cargo, thanks to our strong focus on training and our reputation as an employer of choice. We attract some of the industry's top talent across a diverse range of specialities, bringing international experience from various parts of the globe. The collective experience and competencies of these professionals enable Etihad Cargo to maintain its status as one of the best organisations to work for.

Do you employ many foreign nationals in the cargo operation?

Naturally, as Etihad Cargo is based in the UAE, we are a diverse organisation and employ different nationalities from around the world. We currently employ 40 nationalities, drawing from their rich international experience. This diversity enriches our operations and contributes to our global perspective and capabilities.

What role do you think AI will have in the airline's cargo operations and planning in the coming years?

AI is already playing a significant role in Etihad Cargo's operations and planning, and its importance will continue to grow in the coming years. Digitalisation is a key priority for me personally, and AI is integral to this transformation. For instance, we utilise AI-powered tools to optimise cargo capacity and streamline handling processes. Furthermore, we recently released Sales Cockpit in partnership with Rotare; this tool enhances our sales organisation's ability to communicate more effectively and deeply with our customers about actual flows and opportunities. As we continue to innovate, AI will be crucial in optimising operations, improving customer interactions, and driving efficiency across our cargo operations.

Rising operational costs, driven by increased fuel prices and higher insurance premiums, are pressuring profit margins. You must balance these costs while trying to maintain competitive pricing and service levels. Easy or difficult?

Balancing rising operational costs while maintaining competitive pricing and service levels is undoubtedly challenging. However, the industry has recognised this necessity, especially in the wake of COVID-19. There is now a significant focus on optimising cost structures across organisations and improving pricing, booking, and communication channels. Digitalisation is a must for freight forwarders and airlines alike to enhance efficiency and reduce costs while ensuring seamless communication of essential information to shippers and authorities. Additionally, the type of aircraft in our fleet plays a vital role in managing fuel consumption and costs. For example, Etihad Cargo's fleet has an average age of 7.5 years, and we operate the most recent, fuel-efficient aircraft available. This approach helps us control costs while maintaining our commitment to high service levels and competitive pricing.

What utilisation are you getting from your freighters? Any plans to increase the fleet?

Today, we operate five freighters in Etihad Cargo's fleet, optimising their utilisation to achieve more than 15 flying hours per day. We are committed to maximising efficiency and meeting growing demand. Looking ahead, we have plans to expand our fleet and will continue to explore opportunities to increase our capacity, ensuring we can support our customers' needs effectively.

Have you any other thought/observation on the Middle East for my report?

The Middle East is undergoing rapid development and strengthening economically, with the UAE at the forefront. The UAE, in particular, offers incredible stability and has a strong vision for future development, making it an attractive hub for various industries. This dynamic environment presents numerous opportunities for growth and innovation, reinforcing the region's strategic importance on the global stage.

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Q & A WITH ANDY WATSON, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, UAE, KENYA & EGYPT, HAE

“We have had a very strong start to the year here in the UAE and are seeing the actual tonnage backing up the projections”

The UK-based aviation services company has much business activity in the Middle East which gives it a good perspective on business prospects in the region.

The Middle Eastern airfreight sector is currently navigating several significant challenges despite an overall positive growth outlook. How are you keeping afloat?

Whilst we acknowledge the market is very competitive and a lot of capacity has come back into the market, we are lucky to represent one of the largest freighter fleets in the region in terms of DHL Aviation and airlines with expanding capacity in terms of Air Astana, Air Canada and Etihad as a GSA in the region.

Can there be any more significant location for you in the region than Dubai? Have you any plans to expand office locations in the region?

The UAE is a key home market for us, which also allows us to offer cross trade, interline and export and import services. We also have representation via agents in other GCC countries and have our own operations in Egypt. We are always keen to grow.

The Middle Eastern airfreight market is expected to grow significantly, with IATA projecting a 12.3% increase in cargo demand for 2024. Are you seeing this in your turnover/activity?

We have had a very strong start to the year here in the UAE and are seeing the actual tonnage backing up the projections. The Middle East will always be very competitive due to its position as an ideal hub to feed into Africa, the GCC and most destinations globally direct. The current market reflects this with a lot of the world's largest carriers based in the region and others offering significant capacity to multiple destinations, with multiple rotations. This makes maximising revenue and capacity extremely challenging on a week-to-week basis. We have also seen an increase in our interline activity, another key strand to how we can support our carrier partners.

Concerns over China's economic performance and inflationary pressures in the US contribute to fluctuations in demand for air cargo for carriers operating in the Middle East. Is that your experience?

Not really at this stage but things are so fluid globally we need to

remain proactive and agile to changes in demand and always have our solutions in place. For example the recent upswing in sea/air brings opportunity for companies such as ours.

What sort of tonnages are your airline clients sending out of Dubai? Where are the major traffic flows going out of the UAE?

We have seen a major increase in tonnages month-on-month across all our airlines we represent. Sea/air business remains the primary service and we are seeing large volume spikes increasing ex ISC and Asia via the ME region. However we are also seeing further developments with the traditional transit through the region moving towards uplift direct from origin to destinations.

How long have you been established in Dubai? What staff levels have you got?

We have been established in Dubai since 2006. We have eight staff covering commercial and operation requirements supported by our team of six ops and C/S staff in NBO who provide a variety of functions for us.

Do you circulate staff from EMA to DUB for operational reasons?

No. However we trade and utilise expertise and knowledge from across the group through our own HAE online platform. We are unique in the fact that we have our own self developed Quote Management System – QMS. QMS allows us to share functions many companies do in country offshore for example, we do our sales and local customer service in country, we do our ops and data capture offshore and we do our solutions work in a variety of countries.

What is your general opinion of the region as a source of business for HAE Group?

The region continues to be a key strategic office and HUB for HAE. We have a very strategic, important footprint that we have invested in for many years. We have one of the largest presences for a global GSA company in the Middle East region and have built it over the past 15 years or so. It allows us to service, and assist where required, both ME based carriers but also our interline airline partners wishing to establish services in the ME region. Our local knowledge both operationally and commercially is of significant value within the group and its offices globally.

GCC REMAINS A PIVOTAL GATEWAY

Albion Aviation Group has partnered with a leading Logistics Service Provider (LSP) in the United Arab Emirates to offer third-party Business-to-Consumer (B2C) customs clearance and final mile delivery solutions for e-commerce shipments. This collaboration leverages a dedicated 2,500 sq m customs-bonded warehouse at Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH), allowing for immediate arrival and clearance of shipments before final mile delivery to any location within the UAE.

The facility features direct airside access, in-house screening capabilities and on-site customs officers, ensuring some of the fastest processing times among LSPs in the region. Operating 24/7, 365 days a year, the LSP provides fully integrated IT systems for real-time parcel tracking and adheres to local customs regulations.

Albion Aviation prefers not to disclose the identity of the LSP, to avoid Albion being sidestepped in the market. However, it is a major listed company specialising in e-commerce and 3PL.

Lewis King, Albion director, comments: "This is a value-added service for our existing clients, including freight forwarders, logistics providers, and global e-commerce shippers. We are thrilled about our new LSP partnership in the UAE and expanding our range of services."

Regarding the Middle Eastern airfreight sector, Lewis observes that it is currently navigating several significant challenges despite an overall positive growth outlook.

He says: "We actually have a very positive outlook and particularly for the e-commerce sector, where there is growing demand and user adoption year on year in the GCC market. A market where there is plenty of disposal income and purchasing power parity within certain demographics. Furthermore transport hubs like the UAE have been pivotal in servicing the ongoing sea-air demand due to the security concerns of routing cargo via the Red Sea to Europe."

"We are focusing on the UK e-commerce market via our Albion UK office and of course countries such as China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan where most of the e-commerce goods originate from for the GCC region."

"The GCC region will remain a pivotal gateway to other continents such as Africa, Europe and further afield to North America, which is credit to the transport infrastructure that countries like the UAE have built and invested in over the past few decades. The UAE continues to lead the way in establishing itself as one of the most important transport corridors here in the region."

He notes the key advantages of the e-commerce LSP setup at Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH) include: warehouse access to the flight line for expedited shipment processing times, in-house X-Ray screening machine, a temperature-controlled warehouse, on-site customs office operating 24/7 for immediate clearances and in-house build and break capabilities for lower deck and main deck ULDs.



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MIDDLE EAST FACT FILE

Where

The following countries are commonly considered part of the Middle East:

1. Bahrain
2. Egypt
3. Iran
4. Iraq
5. Israel
6. Jordan
7. Kuwait
8. Lebanon
9. Oman
10. Palestine
11. Qatar
12. Saudi Arabia
13. Syria

14. Turkey
15. United Arab Emirates (UAE)
16. Yemen

Egypt, while primarily in North Africa, is also included due to its strong cultural and historical connections to the Middle East.

Top Players

Top 10 air cargo airlines in the region:

1. Emirates SkyCargo
 - Hub: Dubai International Airport (DXB)
 - Base Country: United Arab Emirates
 - Specialty: Wide network, diverse cargo including perishables, pharmaceuticals and high-value goods.
2. Qatar Airways Cargo
 - Hub: Hamad International Airport (DOH)
 - Base Country: Qatar
 - Fleet Size: 28 dedicated freighters
 - Specialty: Strong network in Europe, Asia and Americas specialised solutions for pharmaceuticals and perishables.
3. Etihad Cargo
 - Hub: Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH)
 - Base Country: United Arab Emirates
 - Fleet Size: Five freighters, along with belly-hold capacity in passenger aircraft
 - Specialty: Focus on pharmaceuticals, electronics and fashion.
4. Saudia Cargo
 - Hub: King Abdulaziz International Airport (JED)
 - Base Country: Saudi Arabia
 - Fleet Size: Around seven freighters, significant belly-hold capacity
 - Specialty: Strong presence in Europe, Africa, and Asia, diverse cargo services.
5. Turkish Cargo
 - Hub: Istanbul Airport (IST)
 - Base Country: Turkey
 - Fleet Size: Over 20 freighters, extensive belly-hold capacity
 - Specialty: Extensive global network, special cargo handling, including livestock and pharmaceuticals.
6. El Al Cargo
 - Hub: Ben Gurion International Airport (TLV)
 - Base Country: Israel
 - Fleet Size: Primarily belly-hold in passenger aircraft
 - Specialty: Security-sensitive cargo, strong connections to Europe and North America.
7. EgyptAir Cargo
 - Hub: Cairo International Airport (CAI)
 - Base Country: Egypt
 - Fleet Size: Several dedicated freighters
 - Specialty: Strong connections within Africa, Europe and the Middle East; diverse cargo types.
8. Iran Air Cargo
 - Hub: Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA)
 - Base Country: Iran
 - Fleet Size: Limited number of freighters, significant belly-hold capacity
 - Specialty: Regional cargo, diverse commodities.
9. Kuwait Airways Cargo
 - Hub: Kuwait International Airport (KWI)
 - Base Country: Kuwait
 - Fleet Size: Primarily belly-hold in passenger aircraft
 - Specialty: Regional cargo services, growing network.
10. Oman Air Cargo
 - Hub: Muscat International Airport (MCT)
 - Base Country: Oman



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- Fleet Size: Limited number of dedicated freighters, significant belly-hold capacity
- Specialty: Regional and international cargo, specialised handling services.

Population numbers

The estimated populations for Middle Eastern countries as of 2023:

1. Bahrain: 1,783,000
 2. Egypt: 109,300,000
 3. Iran: 87,420,000
 4. Iraq: 43,270,000
 5. Israel: 9,700,000
 6. Jordan: 11,200,000
 7. Kuwait: 4,391,000
 8. Lebanon: 5,482,000
 9. Oman: 4,603,000
 10. Palestine: 5,270,000
 11. Qatar: 2,938,000
 12. Saudi Arabia: 35,870,000
 13. Syria: 21,920,000
 14. Turkey: 85,710,000
 15. United Arab Emirates (UAE): 9,972,000
 16. Yemen: 33,970,000
- Estimated regional population in 2023: 472,799,000

Regional history

The dawn of aviation in the Middle East began in 1909, six years after the Wright brothers' famous flight on the coast of North Carolina. In a cold and blustery December of that year, Belgian Baron Pierre de Caters and the world-renowned Frenchman Louis Blériot piloted the first heavier-than-air flying machines over Istanbul — then commonly known in Europe as Constantinople — the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which encompassed much of the Middle East at the time.

Early developments

- 1932: EgyptAir is founded, one of the oldest airlines in the Middle East, and begins operations with cargo services as part of its offerings.

Post-World War II expansion

- 1945: Middle East Airlines (MEA) is established in Lebanon, contributing to regional airfreight services.

- 1947: The founding of Gulf Air, originally a private company owned by a Bahraini entrepreneur, significantly impacts air transport in the Gulf region.

Modernisation and growth

- 1985: The establishment of Emirates in Dubai, which rapidly grows to become one of the world's leading air cargo carriers.
- 1993: Qatar Airways is founded, with Qatar Airways Cargo becoming a major player in global airfreight.

Technological advancements and network expansion

- 2003: The introduction of the Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 by Emirates SkyCargo enhances capacity and efficiency for airfreight services.

- 2004: Etihad Airways is founded, with Etihad Cargo quickly developing into a significant airfreight carrier in the region.

21st Century developments

- 2010: Qatar Airways Cargo introduces its first dedicated freighter aircraft, enhancing its cargo capabilities.
- 2014: Saudia Cargo expands its fleet with the addition of Boeing 747-8F and Boeing 777F freighters, boosting its cargo capacity.

Recent innovations and challenges

- 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic prompts Middle Eastern carriers to adapt by increasing cargo operations due to the drop in passenger flights. Emirates SkyCargo, Qatar Airways Cargo and Etihad Cargo play crucial roles in transporting medical supplies and vaccines globally.

- 2021: The Abraham Accords open up new opportunities for airfreight between Israel and several Arab countries, including the UAE and Bahrain, fostering greater regional trade connectivity.

These dates reflect key milestones that have helped shape the airfreight industry in the Middle East, highlighting the region's strategic importance in global logistics and trade.

Top cargo airports

Some of the top cargo airports in the Middle East along with their approximate annual cargo tonnages:

1. Dubai International Airport (DXB), UAE
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Approximately 2.5 million tonnes
 - Key Features: Major hub for Emirates SkyCargo, extensive global network.
2. Doha Hamad International Airport (DOH), Qatar
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Around 2.1 million tonnes
 - Key Features: Hub for Qatar Airways Cargo, state-of-the-art facilities.
3. Bahrain Airport
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Approximately 350,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Express Cargo Village.
4. King Abdulaziz International Airport (JED), Saudi Arabia
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Around 600,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Major cargo gateway for Saudia Cargo, strategic location.
5. King Khalid International Airport (RUH), Saudi Arabia

- Annual Cargo Tonnage: Approximately 450,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Key cargo hub in the Saudi capital, supports domestic and international freight.
6. Sharjah International Airport (SHJ), UAE
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Around 400,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Significant cargo operations, strategic location for regional freight.
 7. Istanbul Airport (IST), Turkey
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Approximately 1.4 million tonnes
 - Key Features: Major hub for Turkish Cargo, extensive global reach.
 8. Kuwait International Airport (KWI), Kuwait
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Around 250,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Growing cargo operations, strategic position in the Gulf region.
 9. Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport (BEY), Lebanon
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Approximately 150,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Key cargo gateway for Lebanon, supports regional trade.
 10. Muscat International Airport (MCT), Oman
 - Annual Cargo Tonnage: Around 200,000 tonnes
 - Key Features: Hub for Oman Air Cargo, modern cargo facilities.

These tonnages are estimates based on the latest available data and may vary slightly year to year.

Future proof

Several planned and upcoming airports in the Middle East aim to bolster the region's position as a global aviation hub. Here are some notable projects:

Saudi Arabia

1. King Salman International Airport (Riyadh)
 - Key Features: Planned to be one of the world's largest airports, serving as a new hub for Riyadh.
 - Capacity: Expected to handle up to 185 million passengers annually by 2050.
 - Completion: Initial phases by 2030.
2. Neom Bay Airport
 - Location: Neom
 - Key Features: Part of the Neom mega-city project, focusing on futuristic technologies and sustainability.

- Capacity: Designed to handle significant cargo volumes.

- Completion: First phase operational, full completion expected in the 2030s.

Red Sea International Airport

- Location: Red Sea Project
- Key Features: Serves the luxury tourism project along the Red Sea coast.
- Completion: Expected to be fully operational by 2030.

United Arab Emirates

4. Al Maktoum International Airport (Dubai World Central - DWC)
 - Location: Dubai
 - Key Features: Planned to be the largest airport in the world when fully completed.
 - Capacity: Ultimately handling over 12 million tonnes of cargo annually.
 - Completion: Ongoing phased expansion, with major milestones expected around 2030.

Qatar

5. Hamad International Airport Expansion
 - Location: Doha
 - Key Features: Major expansion to increase capacity and enhance facilities.
 - Completion: Expected by 2025.

Oman

6. Muscat International Airport Expansion
 - Location: Muscat
 - Key Features: Continued expansion to increase capacity and modernise facilities.
 - Completion: Various phases, with significant improvements by 2030.

Kuwait

7. Kuwait International Airport (New Terminal 2)
 - Location: Kuwait City
 - Key Features: New terminal to enhance capacity.
 - Completion: Expected by 2025.

Bahrain

8. Bahrain International Airport Expansion
 - Location: Manama
 - Key Features: Expanding and enhancing cargo facilities.
 - Completion: Ongoing, with major projects expected by 2025.

Iraq

9. Baghdad International Airport Expansion
 - Location: Baghdad
 - Key Features: Modernisation and expansion to improve infrastructure.
 - Capacity: Increasing cargo capacity significantly.
 - Completion: Various phases, with key improvements by 2030.

Turkey

10. Istanbul New Airport (Expansion Phases)
 - Location: Istanbul
 - Key Features: Continued expansion to become one of the largest airports globally.
 - Completion: Phased development, with major milestones by 2030.

These projects reflect the Middle East's strategic efforts to enhance its aviation infrastructure, supporting cargo traffic and reinforcing its status as a global aviation hub.



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