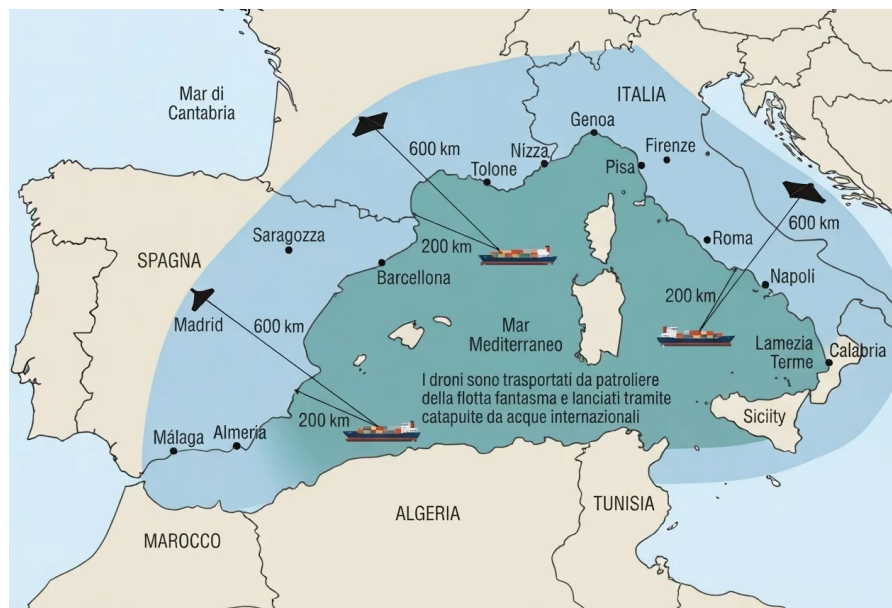




American intelligence warns: Russian drones from the sea against Italy, France and Spain

According to the US, Moscow could launch Gerbera drones from merchant ships in the Mediterranean. Airports, ports and critical infrastructure in the crosshairs.

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U.S. intelligence has shared with European governments an alert about the possibility that Russia could use sea-launched drones to strike targets in the Mediterranean. According to information reported by Lithuanian sources to the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, the plan involves loading unmanned aircraft onto merchant ships for takeoff in open waters. Within the range of these drones would be the coasts of Italy, France and Spain, with Calabria included among possible targets. The alert would not refer to an imminent attack but rather to a hybrid warfare scenario characterized not only by destructive incursions but also by simple overflights, similar to those already recorded in recent months in the Baltic republics and Germany.

The model identified is the Gerbera, a relatively compact Russian drone measuring approximately two meters in length with a wingspan of 2.5 meters and maximum weight of 18 kilograms. The aircraft can reach a speed of approximately 160 kilometers per hour and has a maximum range of approximately 600 kilometers, variable depending on payload and weather conditions. Compared to the larger Shahed and Geran, the Gerbera would be easier to transport and launch, thus allowing a vessel to carry multiple units and prepare them for takeoff with relatively simple systems. A drone launched at a distance of 200-300 kilometers from the coast could take between an hour and a half to two hours to reach European territory.

The possible use of these aircraft would not necessarily aim at large-scale destruction of critical infrastructure. Limited explosive payload could still cause fires, damage exposed equipment or force temporary closure of an airport or port. British analyst Keir Giles observes that geographic distance from Russia would not constitute a guarantee of security, since the possible target could be identified at the point deemed most vulnerable in the European system. The objective, according to cited experts, could also be of an economic and political nature, aimed at demonstrating Russian capability to strike the so-called European rear and generate a reaction in public opinion.

The warning after the CIA mission to Moscow

Lithuanian authorities would have begun managing this information shortly after CIA Director John Ratcliffe's trip to Moscow on August 25. According to diplomatic sources, at least one Baltic country would have been informed in advance of the mission. Both the Wall Street Journal and Politico reported that Ratcliffe traveled to the Russian capital to warn Russia against possible attacks or provocations against NATO. The information would have been subsequently shared with France, Italy and Spain. In Paris, the alert would have taken on particular significance after the Defense Council meeting convened by Emmanuel Macron on September 16.

The choice of the three Mediterranean countries is also linked to their internal political situation. In 2027, major electoral campaigns are planned, and a possible Russian action could aim to exploit fear, instability, and European public opinion's weariness regarding the conflict in Ukraine. Vulnerability would not be solely military: a limited-scale attack could generate consequences disproportionate to actual material damage.

Russian precedents and experiments

The idea of using civilian vessels to launch drones did not originate with the latest alert. Already in 2020, ZALA, a Russian unmanned aircraft manufacturer linked to the Kalashnikov group, had conducted demonstration launches from a moving vessel. The experiments reportedly resumed in October 2024 from a maritime platform. Significant episodes occurred in the Baltic: in February, a Swedish military vessel reportedly detected a drone launched from the Russian electronic intelligence ship Zhigulevsk in the Öresund Strait. The aircraft was disrupted by Swedish authorities and the flight was considered a violation of airspace.

In September 2024, the Russian Telegram channel Rybar published a map of the Mediterranean hypothesizing the possibility that Geran-5 drones could be supplied to Algeria and used against targets in southern France. The Lithuanian source compares the hypothesized strategy to that of a Ukrainian operation in which drones were hidden in containers transported across Russia and subsequently used against Russian air bases. The stated objective would be to demonstrate that geographical distance does not necessarily guarantee immunity from attacks.

European responses and open questions

The growing sabotage activity attributed to Russia is described as functional to multiple objectives: weakening European support for Ukraine, creating divisions within NATO, and increasing pressure on the population. Poland also has similar information. Prime Minister Donald Tusk emphasized the capacity already demonstrated by European countries to intercept operations of this type. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys summed up Vilnius's position by stating that "Russia will not hide. We simply must avoid consequences." The possibility of using naval platforms would not be an exclusive Russian prerogative: Ukraine has already employed vessels for drone launches.

News link: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2026/09/23/6ab411e9fdddf35028b4598.html>