



Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea burning: the hour of Europe and the Rome-Paris axis for maritime security

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While the United States modulates its presence and reduces offensive projection to preserve strategic reserves — securing separate agreements as confirmed by recent contacts in Oman — and Turkey pursues an oscillating tactical convenience, the southern region is experiencing a dramatic turning point. With the Houthis' control of the coast and the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb and the naval blockade imposed on Saudi Arabia, the quintessential energy bottleneck risks remaining unguarded.

For the European Union, and in particular for maritime-oriented powers like France and Italy, this power vacuum is not a crisis to endure, but rather a **historic window of opportunity** to assert autonomous deterrence and defense capabilities.

The strategic value and fragility of Bab el-Mandeb

Located between the western coasts of Yemen and the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea), the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea through a corridor just 16 nautical miles wide, split in half by the island of Perim (Mayyun). Despite lower hydrocarbon volumes compared to Hormuz, its closure or interruption would force routes to circumnavigate the entire African continent, exponentially increasing delivery times and goods costs. With over sixty commercial ships in transit daily, it is the fourth most strategically important natural passage in the world, a vital hub for LNG and crude oil destined for Europe.

Historically a buffer zone and theater of international military bases (from French and American presence in Djibouti to regional ones), the area today witnesses the dangerous evolution of Houthi asymmetric tactics. Exploiting the geographical conformation, radio-controlled dinghies loaded with explosives (IED), naval mines and anti-ship missiles, the Yemeni rebels have tightened an economic and military vise. Attacks on Saudi energy infrastructure (such as the East-West Pipeline stations) and the blockade of the Red Sea directly strike the global logistical chain.

Not just Berlin: the Red Sea is the lifeblood of Italy and Southern Europe

The economic geography of the European Union accounts for an evident asymmetry of perception: what the Baltic and Eastern Flank represent for Germany, the enlarged Mediterranean and the Suez-Bab el-Mandeb corridor represent for Italy.

- Route interruptions and blows to energy infrastructure directly impact industrial and national security.
- Entrusting the safeguarding of this vital hub to ad hoc reactions or third-party logic means condemning Southern Europe to chronic inflationary and energy vulnerability.

The golden opportunity for the Rome-Paris axis

Facing Washington and Ankara's disengagement, Europe cannot limit itself to a marginal posture. It is time for a qualitative leap led by those with a natural maritime vocation: **France and Italy**.

Paris and Rome possess the tools to impose a turning point:

1. **Autonomous projection and deterrence:** Shift the center of gravity of European operations (strengthening and integrating structures like *Aspides*) directly adjacent to the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, actively protecting commercial flows and energy routes.
2. **Active diplomacy:** Overcome the reductive reading of the "Iranian proxy" to promote direct dialogue that addresses the real socio-economic causes of the Yemeni conflict, stabilizing the region at its roots.

If Northern Europe looks East, Rome and Paris have the historical duty to keep the Southern Sea open.