



Bab el-Mandeb effect: Spain says no to ships for Aspides and reaps the rewards of its ports' boom

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BRUSSELS / MADRID – The European Union is continuing its efforts in the Red Sea and adjacent waters through the naval operation **EUNAVFOR ASPIDES**, an initiative established with a **strictly defensive mandate**. Its purpose is to **protect freedom of navigation**, escort civilian merchant vessels, and **intercept drones or missiles** launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the **Bab el-Mandeb** Strait and the Gulf of Aden. Unlike other U.S.-led coalitions, **Aspides does not conduct strikes on Yemeni territory**, limiting itself exclusively to the defense and protection of maritime traffic.

Despite the mission's importance to the security of commercial traffic bound for Europe, **Spain has confirmed that it will not deploy its own naval units** to reinforce the force. On the sidelines of the European Union Defense Council in Brussels, Spanish Defense Minister **Margarita Robles** reiterated Madrid's position during a bilateral meeting with Italian Defense

Minister **Guido Crosetto**. Robles explained that, while supporting and respecting Aspides' objectives, **Spain's operational priority remains Operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta**, the long-standing EU mission to **combat piracy** in the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa.

The shift in global shipping routes and the Cape of Good Hope route

Madrid's decision comes amid a far-reaching geoeconomic context marked by the Red Sea shipping crisis. Due to Houthi attacks, many of the world's leading shipping companies have chosen to **avoid the Suez Canal**, rerouting their services and **sailing around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope**.

This shift in commercial routes has caused a **shift in the logistics** **روح** **toward the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean**, reducing the centrality of the eastern and central Mediterranean. Consequently, **the Strait of Gibraltar has become the primary gateway for merchant vessels** bound for European markets.

Logistical advantages for Spanish ports and differing national strategies

In this new global scenario, **Spanish ports have recorded a sharp increase in freight traffic** and redistribution activities. Commercial hubs such as **Algeciras, Valencia and Barcelona**, together with major Moroccan ports such as **Tanger Med and Nador West Med**, have become strategic hubs for European logistics. The increase in maritime traffic has placed **Spain at the top of European maritime connectivity indices** (UNCTAD), while also enhancing its industrial capacity in **gas refining and regasification**.

While **Italy and other European partners advocate a strong naval presence in the Red Sea** to directly protect routes to the central and eastern Mediterranean, **Spain keeps its resources focused on the Horn of Africa**, while benefiting from the **renewed logistical centrality of its port infrastructure** along the new Atlantic routes.