

Houthi Threat and Trade Routes – General Piasente's Warning: Italy's Defense Begins at Bab el-Mandeb

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As highlighted in a recent interview with *Corriere della Sera*, the defense of the country is no longer measured by traditional borders, but begins where the energy and commercial future of Europe is decided. For Italy, the southern flank — which connects the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean — represents the true strategic backbone. This is reiterated by **Major General Nicola Piasente**, a prominent figure in the Italian Armed Forces — with a solid operational career that includes the prestigious Ranger brevet from the 4th Alpini Paratroopers Regiment — currently responsible for operational planning within the Joint Operational Command (COVI) under the leadership of Gen.C.A. Giovanni Maria Iannucci.

During the conversation with the newspaper about international missions and global stability, the general assessed the European operation Aspides, confirming its crucial importance for the economic stability and security of the State.



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What is the European mission Aspides

Born to protect the freedom of navigation and restore maritime security following the intense regional tensions triggered by the events of October 7, 2023, in the Middle East, **Aspides** (a Greek word meaning "shield") is a defensive operation of the European Union launched to protect merchant traffic from Houthi militia attacks. The mission operates in an extensive area that includes the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the surrounding international waters, ensuring close escort to transiting ships, monitoring the region, and active defense against aerial and missile threats to safeguard strategic flows of raw materials and energy directed towards Europe.

A threat that strikes at the heart of the Italian economy

Although the Houthis do not have Italy as a primary direct target, the instability generated in the Bab el-Mandeb strait risks choking global trade flows, as explained to *Corriere della Sera*.

"What matters is the impact that such actions can have on international commercial traffic and the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb strait," said General Piasente in the interview. "This is the profile that can directly affect Italian national interests, starting with the security of supplies and our trade routes." A crucial area that alone handles about **30% of the entire Italian commercial flow**.

Defensive posture and maximum alert on the southern quadrant

Designed to respond to crises on the international level, the Aspides mission continues to move along a strictly defensive line, while keeping alert systems at the highest level.

"The mission will continue to have a defensive posture, even though all our sensors in the region are activated at the highest levels," Piasente emphasized to *Corriere*. "Aspides must ensure the maritime commercial flow of raw materials and energy towards Italy and Europe. A fundamental element for our economy."



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The value of the southern flank: from Hormuz to Bab el-Mandeb

The stability of the southern flank of NATO and the European Union requires a systemic vision that integrates hot and interconnected areas. In the pages of the newspaper, the general highlighted that "Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb are two *choke points* that affect free navigation."

In this scenario, Italy plays a leading role: it is the only nation to guarantee a continuous naval presence, twelve months a year, with close protection of convoys. As detailed in the interview, currently the frigate **Bergamini** operates at the forefront in Aspides (in close coordination with the Greek Navy and allied forces), alongside the three patrol vessels of the observer mission between Egypt and Israel, the anti-piracy units of *Atalanta*, and the minesweepers *Rimini* and

Crotone ready to operate in the complex area of the Gulf.

Towards an integrated security framework

Thanks to advanced *early warning* technologies and a dense network of cooperation with allies, Italian devices continue to successfully face the asymmetric threat of drones and ballistic missiles.

The summary offered to *Corriere della Sera* by General Piasente sets the new doctrine of Italian and European security: "Everything that happens in the Strait must be integrated with what happens in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. In short, with the lines of connection from Italy to the northwestern Indian Ocean. It is no coincidence that international, European, and NATO missions are in place to protect supply lines." A choral and integrated defense, led by those who know the value of operational readiness in the field.

News link: https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/26_luglio_26/guerra-nel-golfo-il-generale-piasente-la-missione-aspides-piu-importante-che-mai-il-mar-rosso-e-vitale-per-l-italia-e-gli-houthi-6c283961-9cd0-42d6-8dc1-e70b26a32xlk.shtml