

# Raids on Russian ships in Benghazi: Mattarella convenes Supreme Defense Council, risk of escalation in the Mediterranean

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**ROME** – The Russo-Ukrainian war has breached the confines of Eastern Europe and burst into the heart of the Mediterranean, **some 750 kilometers off the Sicilian coast**. On Saturday, November 22, **a raid carried out by Ukrainian naval drones in the Libyan port of Benghazi** – an eastern stronghold controlled by General Khalifa Haftar – **sank the Russian corvette *Merkury* alongside the pier** (a 105-meter vessel worth more than $120 million) **and struck the sanctioned Russian cargo ship *MV Angara* at anchorage**.

The operation, **emphatically claimed by President Volodymyr Zelensky**, prompted Head of State **Sergio Mattarella to urgently convene the Consiglio Supremo di Difesa for Monday at 4:30 p.m.** Although the Quirinale has sought to deny a direct link, the agenda focused on the **assessment of national security and the risks posed by hybrid warfare**

confirms that Italian institutions are on the highest alert.

## The arms route from the Baltic to Cyrenaica

The Benghazi attack represents **the point where two conflicts that had until now run in parallel converge**: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Libya's civil divide between the Government of National Unity of Abdul Hamid Dbeibah in Tripoli and Haftar's forces in Cyrenaica. According to satellite observations analyzed by *Planetek Italia*, the Russian operation had begun in late October from the port of Baltiysk, in the Kaliningrad enclave.
From there, a convoy comprising **several sanctioned merchant vessels** (*Anastasiia*, *Ascalon*, *Lady D*, *Lady R*, as well as *Maia-1* and *MV Angara*) had set sail, escorted by military vessels such as the corvette *Stoykiy* and the frigate *Golovko*. Sailing with their transponders switched off to evade monitoring, the ships carried **dozens of mine countermeasure vehicles, armored personnel carriers, and electronic warfare systems** intended for Haftar's depots and the Russian «Africa Corps» (the successor to the Wagner brigade).

## Kyiv's role in Tripoli and new U.S. moves

It was Ukrainian naval technology — such as the *Sea Baby*, *Sargan-3000*, or *Magura V5* maritime drones — that stopped the weapons from being unloaded.According to converging accounts, **the autonomous vessels did not arrive from the Black Sea, but were reportedly assembled directly in western Libya** (between Tripoli, Misurata and Zawiya), thanks to the presence of an estimated **some two hundred officers and specialists from Kyiv** involved in training militias loyal to Dbeibah, **with alleged support from British intelligence**. Although the Tripoli government formally condemned the raid to preserve diplomatic ambiguity, the operational axis appears to be well established.
Also in the background is **the United States' realignment under the Donald Trump administration**. The U.S. special envoy for the region, businessman **Massad Boulos** (Trump's co-father-in-law), is reportedly opening a privileged channel with Saddam Haftar, son of General Khalifa, **focusing on energy interests and the oil and gas fields of Cyrenaica**.

## Rome's embarrassment and concerns

For Italy, the convergence of the Ukrainian front and the Libyan powder keg represents a scenario of extremely high strategic, energy and migration risk. Foreign Minister **Antonio Tajani**, on a mission to Baku, distanced himself from the incident, stating that **the Italian government had not been informed and had provided no logistical support**.This was an extremely cautious stance, prompted by the presence of an Italian military contingent and intelligence personnel at the **Misurata Air Force Academy**, the base from which the drones reportedly departed.

On the domestic political front, the operation has reignited tensions: while the opposition **questions the government** over what it actually knew about Kyiv's plans, **Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini** — following a previously scheduled meeting with Ukrainian Ambassador to Rome Ihor Brusylo — **expressed serious concern over the risks of a dangerous escalation in the Mediterranean**, just a few hundred kilometers from Italy.

Rome thus finds itself caught in an extremely delicate balance: **unable to condemn an ally such as Kyiv, yet alarmed by the prospect of the war reaching its doorstep for good**.

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