



Red Sea: The Houthi Threat Puts National Interest at Risk

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The news that arrived in recent hours — according to which Iran has ordered the Houthis to prepare to block the Red Sea — is not just a chronicle of regional tensions, but a **direct red alert for the Italian economy**. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is not just a geographical point: it is an arterial vein through which about 12% of global trade passes and a predominant part of *Made in Italy* directed towards Asian markets.

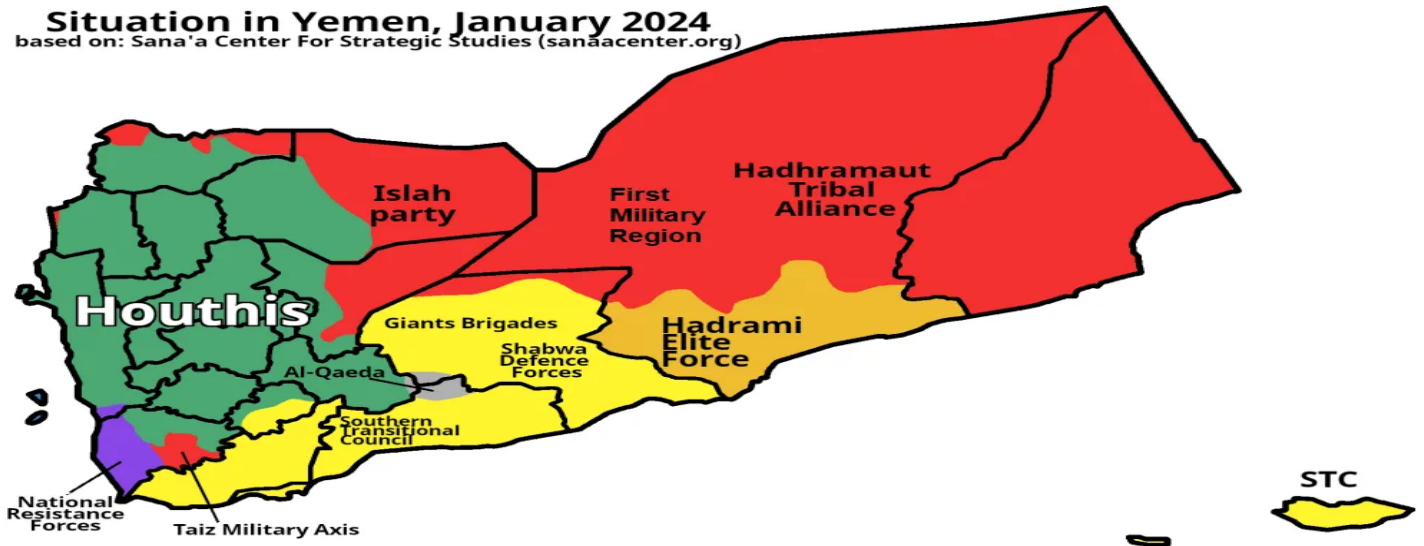
The economic impact: a hefty bill for Italy

A closure or even just a prolonged interdiction of maritime transit is not a remote event, but a concrete risk that translates into daily losses quantifiable in **tens of millions of euros**.

Analysts' estimates speak of damages that can exceed **90-95 million euros per day** for Italian trade exchange. These figures include:

- **Blocked or delayed exports:** The manufacturing sector (food, fashion, mechanics, furniture) suffers slowdowns that erode the competitiveness of our companies.
- **Supply costs:** The failure to receive raw materials and semi-finished products paralyzes domestic production.
- **Domino effect:** The doubling of navigation times (due to the circumnavigation of Africa) and the increase in insurance costs directly affect the final price of goods, fueling inflation and slowing national economic growth.

Situation in Yemen, January 2024
based on: Sana'a Center For Strategic Studies (sanaacenter.org)



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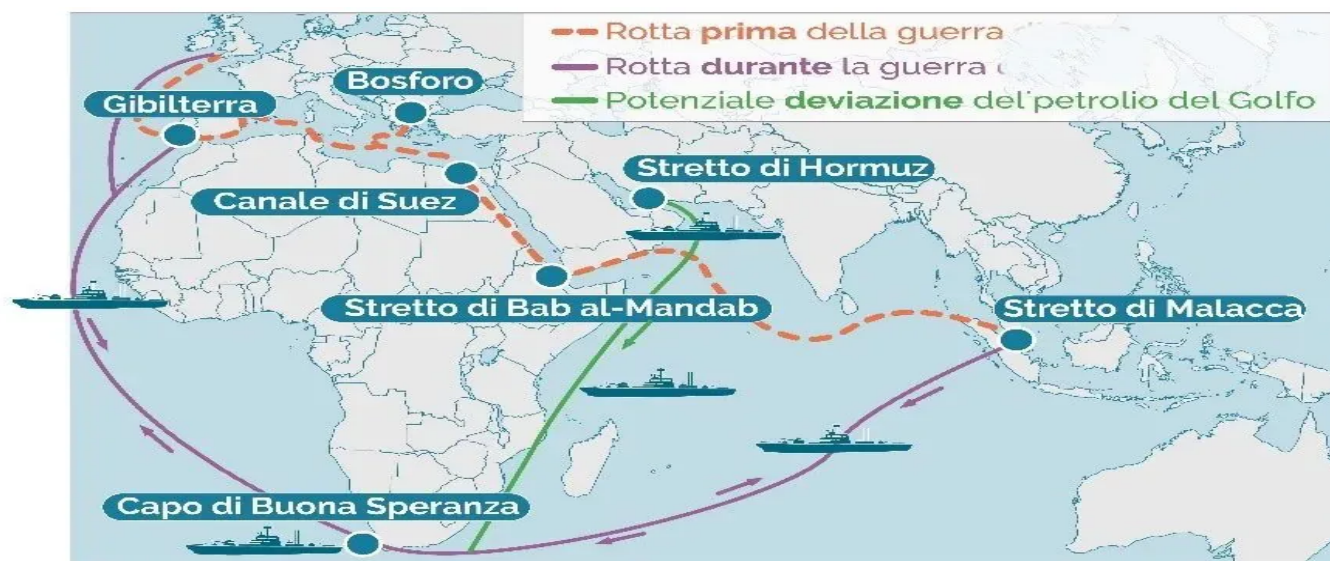
Who are the Houthis and why do they represent an asymmetric threat

To understand the gravity of the situation, it is necessary to analyze the subject that is triggering this crisis. The Houthi movement is a Zaydi Shia Islamist militant organization, supported by Iran, which has controlled much of Yemen since 2014. Although they are not the internationally recognized government, their geographical position along the Red Sea coast gives them a disproportionate maritime interdiction capability.

Their strategy is based on **“asymmetric warfare”**:

- **Offensive capabilities:** Utilizing technologies provided by Iran, the group has an arsenal composed of low-cost drones, anti-ship missiles, and naval mines. These weapons are extremely effective in hitting merchant ships lacking active defenses.

- **Extent of the threat:** The Houthis have demonstrated a disturbing unpredictability, systematically attacking vessels of third nations, including Western military ships. In the past two years, the group has targeted over 170 vessels, causing the sinking of several ships and the loss of human lives.
- **Current escalation:** After a phase of dormancy following the 2025 agreements, the threat has re-emerged in 2026. This makes the group not just an actor in the Yemeni civil conflict, but a true “armed wing” of Iran's regional strategy, capable of paralyzing global trade flows at will.



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Can Italy defend its interests?

The question facing the country is whether our Armed Forces are capable of ensuring the security of this corridor.

Operational capabilities:

The Italian Navy has top-tier assets. A *Carrier Strike Group* centered on the aircraft carrier **Cavour** and supported by *Doria* class destroyers (equipped with some of the most advanced anti-air and anti-missile defense systems in the world) represents a very high-profile defense capability. The Air Force, with its air superiority and reconnaissance assets, completes a security framework of absolute value.

The limits of solitary defense:

Although Italy possesses the technology to escort convoys, the protection of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait cannot be a unilateral action:

1. **Nature of the threat:** Defense requires a saturation of constant surveillance and an international intelligence network.
2. **Multilateralism:** Italy already operates within missions like **Aspides**, fundamental for maritime security. The defense of national interest necessarily involves coordination with European and NATO allies.
3. **Projection:** While the Navy can ensure local defense, upstream counteraction (neutralizing launch batteries or logistical bases) would require a much broader political and military deterrence strategy, involving the entire international coalition.

What alternatives for Italy?

Faced with a threat of this magnitude, diplomacy is not enough, but it is the necessary shield. The options for Italy remain:

- **Strengthening naval and air presence:** Enhancing participation in patrol missions to ensure “safe corridors”.
- **Diplomatic deterrence:** Using diplomatic channels in coordination with the EU and the USA to exert maximum pressure on Iran.
- **Logistical diversification:** Accelerating plans to make supply chains less dependent on single geographical “bottlenecks”.

In conclusion, the Red Sea crisis is not a distant issue. It is a **crucial match for the survival of the national production system**. The capability of our Armed Forces is solid, but success will depend on the ability to integrate this strength into a cohesive European political strategy.