Sigonella 2026: Italy blocks the transit of US air assets to the Middle East

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CATANIA/ROME — A silent diplomatic crisis, culminating in the official denial of the use of the Sicilian airbase for offensive operations. In the last few hours, sources from the **Ministry of Defense have confirmed that the Italian government has blocked the transit of US air assets headed to the Middle East**, citing the lack of **"prior consultation"**.

In the last 48 hours (March 30-31, 2026), the issue of the **Sigonella base** has forcefully returned to the center of the Italian political and military agenda. The case, dubbed "Sigonella 2026" by the media, recalls the diplomatic tension of the historic clash of October 1985, but with profoundly different protagonists and technological contexts.

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Crosetto's stop: "No automatism for war"

The heart of the dispute dates back to a few nights ago, when the Air Force General Staff intercepted US flight plans that included landing at Sigonella of fighter-bombers (reportedly F-15s and support assets) already in flight, with the aim of refueling and departing for "kinetic" operations against targets in Iran.

The Minister of Defense, **Guido Crosetto**, acted firmly: through the Chief of Defense Staff, General Luciano Portolano, it was communicated to the US command that the landing was not authorized. The technical reason lies in the violation of bilateral agreements governing the use of bases: for **direct military operations not covered by a NATO mandate, Italy must be consulted in advance**. "Italy is not at war," the Minister reiterated, marking a clear boundary between logistical support and active participation in the conflict.

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The Drone Hub: From Triton to Global Hawk

While the fighters have been stopped, intelligence activity does not cease. Sigonella confirms itself as the beating heart of global reconnaissance. In recent days, radar analysts have tracked persistent drone missions of **MQ-4C Triton** and **RQ-4 Global Hawk** taking off from Sicily towards the Iranian coasts and the Persian Gulf.

These unmanned aircraft operate in a gray area: although not "offensive," they provide the telemetry and data necessary for bombings carried out by other platforms (such as B-2s departing from the USA or ships of the Sixth Fleet). This **role as the "eye of the Mediterranean" makes the Sicilian base a sensitive target**, leading the Ministry of the Interior to raise the alert level in the areas of Lentini and Belpasso.

Sovereignty and Geopolitics: The weight of bilateral agreements

The issue raises once again the theme of national sovereignty over bases granted to the United States. The agreements of 1954 and subsequent memoranda (such as the "Shell" of 1995) provide that the installations are under Italian command, although operationally managed by the Americans.

The challenge for Rome in 2026 is to maintain the balance between the historic Atlantic alliance and the need not to turn Sicilian territory into an uncontrolled launch platform for operations that go beyond NATO's collective defense.

News link: https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/politica/26_marzo_31/italia-nega-usa-sigonella-crosetto-86a05dff-9ac6-46cf-b07b-f69fe19c1xlk.shtml