



The Navy Assaults the Shadow Fleet: Raid Off the Coast of Sicily

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In an action marking a significant crackdown on maritime security in the central Mediterranean, the Italian Navy conducted a daring boarding of the tanker **MV South Star**, suspected of belonging to the so-called Russian “shadow fleet”. The operation, carried out on July 20th southeast of Sicily, featured the offshore multipurpose patrol vessel **ITS Paolo Thaon di Revel**, supported by the embarked NH90 helicopter.

The Intervention and Satellite Tracking

The action is not random but part of a constant monitoring framework of maritime routes. According to AIS tracking data reported by *Itamilradar*, the MV South Star entered the Mediterranean Sea by crossing the Strait of Gibraltar on July 16th. Four days later, while the merchant ship was transiting in international waters southeast of Sicily, the interception took place.

The Navy unit deployed the boarding team and the NH90 helicopter's air support to conduct a thorough inspection aimed at verifying the flag, an operational pillar provided by control protocols. Currently, the tanker has been escorted and is moored in the port of Tunis, although it is not formally seized at the moment.

Key Points of the Operation:

- **Date of boarding:** July 20, 2026, in international waters southeast of Sicily.
- **Unit employed:** Multipurpose patrol vessel ITS Paolo Thaon di Revel with NH90 helicopter.
- **Legal-operational framework:** European Union's Operation Eunavfor Med Irini.
- **Current status:** Ship moored in Tunis for checks on the false registry.



The Navy boards suspected Russian shadow tanker off the coast of Sicily

The Strategic Role of the ITS Thaon di Revel

The episode highlights the effectiveness and versatility of the *Thaon di Revel* class, highly technological lead-class units equipped with advanced sensor systems, flight deck, and dedicated hangar. These ships allow the Navy to transition from a simple passive surveillance function to an actively operational role, conducting complex and unconventional inspections on the high seas.

Towards a European Axis Against the “Shadow Fleet”

The intervention on the South Star fits into a broader geopolitical context. In parallel with actions in the Mediterranean through Operation Irini, the European Union is extending control powers: the recent green lights from member states for Operation *Eunavfor Atalanta* in the western Indian Ocean demonstrate the willingness to replicate this model of countering oil sanction evasions on a global scale.

Economic sanctions against Russian energy exports thus find in naval forces a direct operational arm, capable of striking on the ground the practices of registry falsification and the use of opaque covers to circumvent international blocks.