



From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Arctic Competence is Not Optional

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If Italy chooses (as it is doing) to deploy units on NATO's eastern flank — from the Baltic region to the Black Sea area — it must accept a simple reality: **in that theater, the cold is not just an environmental factor, it is a multiplier (or a destroyer) of capabilities.** In extreme temperatures, with wind, humidity, and snow, the rules of the game change: mobility slows down, efficiency drops, maintenance becomes more difficult, and psychophysical resilience is tested. In short: it's not enough to just “know how to fight.” You must know how to **live, move, and operate** in extreme cold.

The Cold as a Silent Adversary

The cold strikes in a subtle way: it makes no noise, it is not visible, but it drains energy, reduces fine dexterity, increases errors, amplifies reaction times, and makes every logistical chain more fragile. Heat loss and, above all, **moisture management** (sweat that then freezes) can degrade a team more quickly than any physical obstacle. And when the temperature drops

below severe thresholds, even a simple task — communicating, orienting, handling equipment — becomes complex.

For this reason, “**cold weather capability**” cannot be considered a seasonal add-on: **it must become a stable training competence, with standards, checks, dedicated instructors, and a unit culture that internalizes it.**

Why Finns are Natural Instructors

Finland is one of the European countries that has most transformed winter into an ordinary operational dimension. It's not folklore: it's a school. For the Finnish armed forces, moving and operating in harsh conditions is part of normal training, not a “special course.” Precisely for this reason, Finns can be **excellent instructors** for allied units: they bring not only techniques but above all mentality, discipline, and established procedures.

The added value, moreover, is practical: they teach how to make cold deployment sustainable in the medium term, preventing winter from becoming a “consumer” of readiness.

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The Most Important Lesson: Layer, Don't Weigh Down

The article you cite explains it clearly: the heart of survival and efficiency in winter is **layering**. The idea is simple and powerful: with more adjustable layers, you can adapt clothing to activity and weather, avoiding both freezing and overheating (which leads to sweat, and thus cold after a few minutes).

- **Base layer:** breathable materials (like merino) that retain heat even when damp and help manage sweat. In truly severe conditions, it's better to foresee the possibility of a double base layer.
- **Intermediate and protective layers:** the air between layers is “thermal magic.” It's not just about “more weight on you”: it's about creating air chambers and staying dry.
- **Outer/camouflage layer:** winter suits and overgarments that protect from snow and wind and improve camouflage, without necessarily being “very warm”: often their value is preventing snow from entering and maintaining effective layering.

The most concrete operational rule is the one recalled in the text: **change the base layer when it's damp** and immediately add the warm layer when stopping. The cold punishes especially during transitions: sudden stops, waits, prolonged observations.

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Backpack, Routine, and Discipline: Cold Rewards Order

Another decisive point of the article is the logic of the “minimum package” for 24 hours: **dry changes, warmth, ability to have a hot meal, and weather protection**. It's not glamorous, but it's what separates a unit that “endures” from one that maintains initiative.

Here it's not about manual lists, but about **unit routines**:

- systematic waterproofing of contents (even with simple and robust solutions),
- storage order consistent with use (what is needed immediately must be accessible),
- meticulous attention to socks/gloves/base layers, because hands and feet are often the first point of failure.

Electronics and Batteries: Modern Warfare Suffers the Cold

The cold doesn't just hit the body: it hits technology. The article recalls a practical fact: in a freezing environment, common batteries collapse, while **lithium batteries** hold up better. But even so, energy management becomes a critical factor: **devices in pockets to exploit body heat**, protected and dry supplies, and realistic consumption planning.

The same goes for optics and sensors: condensation, frost, dirty lenses that fog up. The solution is not “more technology,” but **simple and continuous maintenance** and reasoned redundancy (knowing how to operate even when digital degrades).

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The “Thermal Signature” and the Reality of Winter

A very modern passage of the text concerns the use of thermal devices: in the cold, retaining body heat is difficult, and thus the signature can become more visible. It's a lesson that must be translated into training not to “do tricks,” but to understand how **the winter environment changes observation, discovery, and survival on the ground.**

What Italian Units Really Need on the Eastern Flank

The point is not to copy someone else's clothing. The point is to build a complete capability, which includes:

1. **Winter training standards** (not occasional), with real field checks.
2. **Instructors and structured exchanges** with Nordic countries (Finland primarily) to import procedures, not just “advice.”
3. **Winter logistics:** dry changes, waterproofing, hot meals, energy management, maintenance.
4. **Unit culture:** discipline of changing layers, care of hands/feet, anti-moisture routines, order in the backpack.
5. **Integration with the mission:** cold competence must be part of the operational plan, not a side note.

On the eastern flank, winter offers no discounts. The difference between a unit that “stands on the ground” and one that “dominates the ground” comes from seemingly trivial details: a dry base layer, a spare glove, suitable batteries, a coherent storage order, an internalized procedure. This is where Finland can teach a lot: not because it has secrets, but because it has turned cold into operational normality.

If Italy wants its units deployed from Lithuania to Bulgaria to be credible in every season, it must make the ability to **live, move, and operate in extreme cold** a structural competence. It is not a “winter” chapter: it is readiness, deterrence, survival. And, ultimately, effectiveness.

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