General Masiello: «The drone will have to be in every soldier's backpack». This is how the Italian Army is changing

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The battlefield is changing at a speed probably never experienced before and the Italian Army must change along with it.

This is the message that emerges from the intervention of General Carmine Masiello, Chief of Staff of the Army, guest of the "Bunker" episode of *Codice – Life is digital*, broadcast on Rai 1 on August 28, 2026 and conducted by Barbara Carfagna.

An episode dedicated to new forms of defense, from hybrid threats to drones, from cybersecurity to cognitive warfare, in which Masiello outlined with particular clarity the transformation underway in the Armed Force.

The starting point is the return of conventional war to the European continent.

«We have come out of practically 80 years of permanent peace», Masiello recalled, emphasizing how since February 2022 Europe has been forced to confront once again a phenomenon that

seemed to belong to another era.

But the war observed today by the Army is no longer only that of tanks, artillery and trenches.

Three wars fought simultaneously

According to Masiello, contemporary conflict can be read as the overlapping of three different wars.

The first is conventional warfare: tanks, artillery, fortifications and trenches.

The second is technological warfare, fought through missiles, cyber systems and drones.

The third is cognitive warfare, in which the objective also becomes to influence perceptions, public opinion and decision-making processes.

Ukraine, in particular, represents for land forces an enormous laboratory from which to observe the evolution of war and quickly derive operational lessons from it.

And it is precisely from these lessons that an important part of the transformation of the Italian Army is born.

Training, technology and values

Masiello recalled the three directions indicated since the moment of his appointment to lead the Army.

The first is training, recovering what the Chief of Staff defines as preparation for the «worst-case scenario»: that is, returning to training also for a high-intensity war scenario.

The second is technology.

The third is values, defined by Masiello as the «cornerstone» that allows the Army to continue to be an institution and not simply a professional organization.

Holding the three elements together, however, is perhaps an even more difficult transformation: the cultural one.

«Ideas have no rank»

One of the most interesting passages of the interview concerns the internal functioning of an inevitably hierarchical structure.

Masiello believes it is essential to be able to intercept ideas coming from younger military personnel, often the first to understand technologies and changes that evolve with extreme rapidity.

From this comes a slogan that the General recalled during the interview:

«Ideas have no rank».

It means creating within the military organization mechanisms capable of allowing a valid idea to rise regardless of the rank of whoever proposed it.

The same applies to what Masiello defines as the «philosophy of error»: learning to accept that during training making mistakes can represent a necessary step to grow, correct oneself and find different solutions.

Final objective: accustom commanders and soldiers to think outside the box.

Not by chance the Army also wanted to introduce officers with philosophical training and a Strategic Sciences program in which preparation is divided between military subjects, STEM disciplines and humanistic and philosophical studies.

The battlefield has become «transparent»

Then Masiello gets to the heart of the technological revolution.

The modern battlefield, he explains, has become «extremely transparent».

Sensors, satellites, electronic systems and especially drones make it increasingly difficult to hide men and equipment and drastically reduce the possibility of obtaining the surprise that for centuries represented one of the fundamental principles of military art.

And it is precisely in this scenario that what the Chief of Staff defines as the «droneization of the Army» takes shape.

«The drone will be part of the soldier»

Masiello indicates three directions.

The first concerns acquisition.

The technological cycle of drones is now so rapid that normal procedures risk delivering systems to units that are already outdated.

If a year and a half or two years pass between the request and the arrival of a drone, Masiello observes, that technology may already have become obsolete.

Hence the need to drastically shorten timeframes.

The second direction is cultural: commanders must learn to systematically insert unmanned systems into their maneuver schemes.

But Masiello goes even further.

The soldier must come to consider the drone as a normal part of his equipment, something to have «in the backpack» and to use like other individual tools.

The third direction is perhaps the most interesting: the ability to build drones directly within the Armed Force, using 3D printing and components acquired autonomously.

It is a setting that could profoundly modify even the traditional relationship between industry, procurement, and end user.

Electronic warfare: only a few minutes to survive

But the drone is only part of the problem.

According to Masiello, the very meaning of air superiority has changed.

It is no longer enough to control the sky through traditional aircraft. Dominance must simultaneously encompass airspace, space, sensors and above all the electromagnetic spectrum.

Electronic warfare thus returns to the center of survival on the battlefield.

Masiello brings an extremely concrete example drawn from the Russian-Ukrainian front: in the contact zone, an electromagnetic signal or a man who is detected may have only a few minutes before a drone arrives.

«It lasts no more than 4-5 minutes», explains the General.

A sentence that alone makes clear how much dispersion, concealment, mobility, communications and decision-making times have changed.

Artificial intelligence in command and logistics

Another fundamental chapter is artificial intelligence.

The Army is already working on its application in command and control systems and decision-making processes, with the goal of reducing cognitive load on commanders.

Applications are under study and already in use in logistics as well, especially in predictive capabilities.

But Masiello immediately sets two limits.

The first is to avoid what he calls «cognitive atrophy»: a commander must not reach the point of automatically considering any solution proposed by an artificial intelligence system to be correct.

The second limit is even more clear-cut.

«We will never delegate a decision about life and death to an algorithm»

For the Chief of Staff of the Army, ultimate responsibility must remain human.

Technology will be able to collect data, process it, suggest solutions and greatly accelerate the decision-making process.

But when it comes to deciding on the life or death of a person, the decision cannot be delegated to the machine.

«It will always be a man who decides on life and death», Masiello stated.

It is probably one of the politically and ethically most important passages of the entire interview.

Mission Command: say what to do, not how to do it

Technology also imposes a different speed of decisions.

And this inevitably means granting greater autonomy to lower levels of the chain of command.

Masiello explicitly invokes the principle of *Mission Command*: the subordinate is told the objective to be achieved, but is given autonomy over the best way to achieve it.

«We say what. We never say how», the General summarizes.

A significant cultural change for a traditionally hierarchical organization, in which individual initiative becomes essential when there is no longer time on the field to continually wait for detailed orders from higher levels.

Technological sovereignty: not to depend on others when it will really matter

Finally, there is the issue of technological sovereignty.

For Masiello, it essentially means avoiding the Army being completely dependent on external entities who, at the moment of greatest need, may be unable or unwilling to provide assistance, updates, components or technologies.

But technological sovereignty cannot be built by the Armed Forces alone.

Industry, universities, research centers and startups are needed.

Masiello also recalled the digital platform promoted by the Minister of Defense precisely to encourage dialogue between these different entities and allow Defense to more quickly access the expertise present in the country.

The future scenario: sensors ahead, robots behind, men finally

The probably most futuristic passage comes in the final part of the interview.

Masiello addresses the risk of a possible «ethical asymmetry» between Western armies and adversaries who could adopt very different criteria in the use of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons.

One possible response is to imagine a progressively stratified battlefield.

A first layer occupied mainly by sensors, tasked with identifying and gathering information.

A second in which robotic systems could directly confront each other.

Only then would human beings come into action.

Masiello thus summarizes one of the hypotheses that other armies are also reasoning about: «Probably robots will have to fight each other».

It does not mean that the soldier will disappear from the battlefield.

It probably means the opposite: to protect him by progressively placing sensors, drones and autonomous systems in front of him, designed to identify the threat and, when possible, face it before men themselves directly enter the most dangerous zone.

The Army that emerges from Masiello's words

From the statements of the Chief of Staff, an Army model emerges that is profoundly different from the one imagined only a few years ago.

An Army still founded on infantry, artillery, armored vehicles, and conventional capabilities, which the war in Ukraine has proven to be far from outdated.

But at the same time, an Armed Force in which every level will have to coexist with drones, electronic warfare, artificial intelligence, cyber, sensors, and robotic systems.

And in which the decisive advantage might not simply belong to whoever possesses the most powerful weapon, but to whoever manages to observe, understand, decide, and adapt more rapidly than the adversary.

This is probably the central message of Carmine Masiello's intervention at *Codice*: the technological revolution of the Army cannot be merely a race to purchase new systems.

It must first and foremost be a revolution in training, culture, and the way of thinking about war.