The Italian Army and the 2026 Challenge: Robotizing the Front Line with UGVs

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As the debate over personnel shortages in Western armed forces becomes increasingly intense, Ukraine has just set the course for the future: **25,000 unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) contracted in just the first half of 2026**. Kiev's declared goal is radical: to shift 100% of frontline logistics from soldiers to machines.

For Italy, this is not just international news, but a clear operational signal. By utilizing Ukrainian combat *know-how* and the industrial power of **Iveco Defence Vehicles (IDV)**, the Italian Army has a historic opportunity to fill personnel gaps, transforming technological quantity into operational quality.

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The Lesson from Kiev: Replacing Humans Where Risk is Highest

The data reported by Ukrainian Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov is impressive: over **9,000 robotic missions in March 2026 alone**.

- **Logistics and Rescue:** Ukrainian UGVs, like the newly developed **Bizon-L** (certified to NATO standards), are already operating with loads of 300 kg over distances of 50 km, evacuating wounded and transporting ammunition without exposing soldiers to enemy fire.
- **Autonomous Conquest:** For the first time in history, Ukrainian assault units (such as NC13) have captured fortified positions using **exclusively unmanned platforms**.

For Italy, adopting this doctrine would mean maintaining the effectiveness of a brigade while drastically reducing the number of infantry exposed in "hot zones," assigning personnel to roles of supervision and technological management.

The Italian "Brave1": Synergy with the National Industry

Ukraine has gone from zero to 300 terrestrial drone companies in less than four years. Italy is not starting from scratch: it has an industrial base that the world envies.

Iveco Defence Vehicles (IDV) represents the cornerstone of this transition. If Ukraine has codified the Bizon-L to NATO standards, IDV has the capacity to scale this production to heavier and more complex vehicles.

- **From Mechanics to Autonomy:** Iveco's armored chassis, famous for their mine resistance (MRAP), are the perfect base for heavy autonomous systems, capable of operating where small Ukrainian robots stop.
- **NATO Standardization:** Integrating Ukrainian *know-how* would allow IDV to develop "Plug & Play" conversion kits to make vehicles already in service with the Italian Army autonomous, optimizing costs.

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Increasing Personnel without "Enlisting"

Increasing personnel should no longer be understood only in demographic terms. The Italian Army can increase its operational "mass" through:

1. **Hybrid Teams:** A platoon composed of 30 soldiers and 15 UGVs has superior firepower and logistical resilience compared to a traditional platoon of 50 men.
2. **Attracting Talent:** An army that invests in robotics attracts a generation of digital natives, solving the problem of disaffection with traditional military careers.
3. **Economic Sustainability:** As demonstrated by Ukraine's digital procurement system (14 billion hryvnias invested in a few months), mass production of *unmanned* systems has lower costs compared to maintaining and training thousands of specialized soldiers.

Conclusion: A Strategic Imperative

The Ukrainian case demonstrates that the future of defense is already here: **22,000 unmanned missions in three months** have saved thousands of human lives. For Italy, collaboration with Kiev is no longer just military assistance, but a vital technological acquisition opportunity.

By linking **Iveco Defence**'s production capacity to Ukrainian tactical experience, the Italian Army can ensure its technological and operational sovereignty, turning the personnel challenge into the greatest modernization opportunity of the century.