



The United States is not ready for the next war. And Italy? Between drones, missing doctrine, and a lagging industry

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This is the opinion of Daniel L. Davis, a retired U.S. Army officer and security analyst, published on *Military.com*. The author questions the United States' ability to face a modern war, where the massive use of drones has radically changed the battlefield.

Earlier this year, during a press conference in Qatar, President Donald Trump confidently stated: *"No one can beat us. We have the strongest military in the world, by far. Not China, not Russia, no one!"*.

A statement that captures a still imposing military power but hides an underlying problem: the United States is not prepared to fight a modern war. Firepower and technology matter, but the human factor – the ability to integrate soldiers with new tools of war, primarily drones – remains

decisive. And it is precisely in this area that Washington appears to be lagging.

The lesson from Ukraine

Since the Russian invasion in 2022, the conflict in Ukraine has shown that ground warfare has changed radically. Davis, based on studies and interviews with fighters from both sides, emphasizes how drones have transformed the battlefield.

It is not a single model that makes the difference, but the combined use of multiple categories:

- **FPV (First-Person View)**, guided by sight and armed with explosives;
- **bomber drones**, which drop ordnance from above;
- **missile-armed drones**, true attack systems;
- **reconnaissance drones**, which scan the terrain and guide strikes.

The result is that **every meter of territory is constantly under observation and threat**. In Ukraine, stepping out of a trench, even just to eat or for a physiological need, can mean exposure to an attack within minutes.

Traditional attacks with massed tanks – like those Davis conducted during the Gulf War in 1991 – would be a death sentence today. Not surprisingly, **Moscow has started using motorcycles to move on the front**: they do not offer protection, but speed and maneuverability increase the chances of survival compared to an armored vehicle targeted by drones.

The importance of human mass

Despite the technological impact, war remains a matter of men. **Only infantry can take or defend territory**. This is where Russia, with a larger population, has had an advantage: it has limited frontal losses, instead focusing on massive bombardments, drones to immobilize defenses, and infantry to finalize the assault.

Ukraine, with more limited human resources, pays a high price in this war of attrition. And for the United States and NATO, the message is unequivocal: we still do not know how to fight in this way.

The Pentagon has only recently begun to take the drone threat seriously, despite having already received a warning in 2020 during the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But the problem is not only technical: it is cultural and doctrinal.

Washington continues to think in terms of “shock and awe,” of rapid maneuvers and technological dominance. But those strategies no longer work in a peer confrontation scenario.

The illusion of superiority

NATO also needed time to adapt, and Russia took two years to revise its doctrines. But Moscow has changed its approach, while the United States remains anchored to manuals that Ukraine itself has defined as “out of touch with reality.”

The quality of American soldiers and equipment is not in question. What is lacking is the ability to systematize drones, artillery, infantry, and armored vehicles in a battlefield environment saturated with sensors and aerial threats.

Last month, the U.S. Army published a compendium on the lessons learned from the conflict in Ukraine. Useful, certainly. But theory is not enough: radical changes are needed in doctrine, weapon systems, ammunition, and training.

At the moment, there is no trace of this urgent transformation.

A reflection for Italy

The picture outlined by Davis also raises a question about the preparedness of the Italian Army.

In the field of mini and micro drones, Rome is dealing with **rigid regulations that slow down the training and operational process of personnel**, often under the hegemony of external actors. The national defense industry, although with recognized excellence, appears **not yet ready for new technological warfare scenarios** and is **seriously lagging in the space race**, today a strategic factor for battlefield control.

Moreover, there is still **no comprehensive doctrine for unmanned military operations**, essential for integrating land, naval, and aerial drones into a single coherent operational system. Without this conceptual framework, the risk is to remain bound to isolated experiments, unable to generate real multidomain military capability.

A warning from history

History is full of powerful armies that fell for not adapting to the times. If the United States does not want to join that list, they must act now. Every day of delay will translate into lost human lives in the future.

The same goes for Italy: without a technological, regulatory, and cultural leap, we risk arriving too late to the next challenge.

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