



Finland: Italian F-35Bs Land on Highway for Exercise Imminent Field 26

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Finland has opened its highways to one of the most dynamic air exercises of the Atlantic Alliance. From May 18 to 22, 2026, the *Finnish Air Force* is conducting the exercise **Imminent Field 26** (formerly known as *Baana*), focused on decentralized flight operations. The big news this year is the participation of the **Italian Air Force's F-35B fighters**, deployed to test and strengthen operational readiness according to the **ACE** (*Agile Combat Employment*) concept of the Allied Air Command (AIRCOM).

Highways Turned into Runways

At the Jokioinen landing site, set up on a closed section of **Highway 2**, Finnish F/A-18 Hornet fighters, along with other allied aircraft, are training for take-offs and landings away from their home bases. This activity is fully in line with Finland's "mobile battle" concept, which also includes very low-altitude flights to evade enemy radar.

But the real historic debut occurred on May 19, when the **Italian F-35B Lightning IIs** joined the Finnish Hornets on the highway's asphalt strip. The Italian jets, operating from the Pirkkala air base during the exercise, maximized their **STOVL** (*Short Take-Off and Vertical Landing*) capabilities, demonstrating the ability to generate combat sorties even from austere and completely decentralized positions.



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What is the NATO "ACE" Concept?

The Italian detachment is using this exercise to refine the **Agile Combat Employment (ACE)** doctrine.

The key principle of ACE: *Rapidly move aircraft, personnel, and support equipment across multiple bases and makeshift runways. This approach drastically complicates enemy tracking, reduces the vulnerability of allied forces, and ensures the continuity of air power even if main bases are hit or threatened.*

This focus on mobility and rapid dispersion reflects NATO's broader strategy aimed at sharpening the cohesion and operational readiness of member countries under pressure.

Synergy and Civil-Military Coordination

Transforming a public road artery into an operational air base is no small task: highway activities require **very close coordination between civil and military authorities** to ensure territorial safety and logistics of supplies.

By combining Finland's immense experience in dispersed operations with the fifth-generation capabilities of the Italian F-35B detachment, *Imminent Field 26* underscores how allied air forces are learning to operate flexibly. The ultimate goal is clear: to maintain a high operational tempo and preserve NATO's deterrence capability through maximum distribution of forces in the field.