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Surprise: Russia's Lethal T-14 Armata Tank Is in Production

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Russia's T-14 main battle tank—which is part of the Armata family of combat vehicles—is already in production.

While Moscow displayed early developmental models of the new the combat vehicles in public during the 2015 Victory Day parade, most Western analysts had believed that the Armata family was still in its developmental stages. However, according to a top Russian defense industry executive, the Armata family is already in serial production.

Asked recently if the Armata main battle tank would be among the projects that the Kremlin would put on hold as Moscow reduces its defense outlays as oil revenues suffer, Sergei Chemezov, chief executive officer of the Rostec state corporation, told the Wall Street Journal that only new developmental efforts would be halted. “That’s already in serial production,” Chemezov said, when asked specifically about the Armata.

According to Chemezov, the Kremlin has decided that projects that have are well into their development will be continued. “You can’t quit when you’re halfway there,” Chemezov told the *Journal*. “Money has already been invested, and if we stop without finishing, then that will be lost money. Everything that has been started will be finished, and money will be allocated to it.”

The Armata Universal Combat Platform consists of the T-14 main battle tank, the T-15 heavy infantry fighting vehicle and the T-16 armored recovery vehicle, among a host of other vehicles. Another member of the Armata family includes an upgunned heavy assault armored vehicle, which has been dubbed “the Tank Killer” by Russian media. While the T-14 is no slouch in terms of firepower with its new 2A82-1M 125mm gun—which is mounted in an unmanned turret. The “Tank Killer” variant seems to incorporate a derivative of the 2S35 Koalitsiya-SV’s 152mm artillery piece into the Armata chassis in a direct fire mounting.

Meanwhile, footage from a Russian television segment on the T-14 main battle tank component of the Armata family shows an advanced armored three-man crew capsule fitted with touch screen displays. The interface looks simple and intuitive from what can be seen in the video. The Russians also seem to have developed a battle network connecting their T-14s and T-90MS tanks that can relay Instant Messaging, videos and imagery to multiple friendly tanks. The tank is also fitted with GLONASS and NAVSTAR GPS.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the Armata series is the *Afghanit* active protection system (APS). The system uses a 360 active electronically scanned array radar and a potent electronic warfare system to disrupt the guidance of incoming rounds. It also has a countermeasure suite to jam enemy laser guidance systems. As well, the tank is equipped with interceptor rounds for the APS, which are fitted with explosively formed penetrators. That means the Armata’s APS could potentially be effective against even kinetic energy rounds.

APS systems are usually most effective when used against chemical energy rounds like rocket-propelled grenades or missiles.

The Military Balance 2016 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies explains another important feature:

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Most revolutionary is the Armata-based T-14 Main Battle Tank featuring an uncrewed turret. There is emphasis on protection across the platforms—including active protection systems (APS)—reflecting lessons learnt as well as perceptions of future operating environments. . . .

“When it enters service Armata will be the first tank designed for an unmanned turret and APS. Successful fielding of APS will reduce the effectiveness of anti-tank guided missiles and shoulder-fired weapons such as rocket propelled grenades. This will change battlefield dynamics by increasing the importance of cannon, anti-tank guns and tanks.”

But the best way to survive on the battlefield is not to be seen in the first place, as such, the Russians have taken steps to reduce the tanks radar and infrared signature so that it is more difficult to detect and track.

Should the Armata be found—and an incoming round makes it through the APS—the vehicle is protected by dual-layered *Malachit* explosive reactive armor in addition to robust passive armor. The composition of the armor is not known—but it is likely some form of laminated ceramic composite matrix. It's also equipped with slat armor to protect certain areas that would otherwise be vulnerable to rocket propelled grenades.

The Armata is a source of major concern for Western armies. As a direct response to the development of the T-14, Germany recently launched an effort to upgun the Leopard 2 with a new 130mm cannon and is developing plans to launch