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Russia's new secret [weapon](#)... inflatable tanks

by Staff Writers
Khotkovo, Russia (AFP) March 18,
2011

They may look like real [tanks](#) and missiles, but some of the weapons in Russia's arsenal may not all be what they seem.

For the army is making increasing use of inflatable replicas -- decoys deployed in a cunning attempt to deceive potential enemies.

In a workshop in Moscow's suburb Khotkovo, [employees](#) of inflatable equipment company Rusbal sew the fabric used to create fake weapons for their main customer -- the Russian army.

Established in 1993, Rusbal replicates military equipment, such as T-80 tanks, S-300 missiles or fighter jets, for an undisclosed price, but also manufactures inflatable castles and other toys for children.

"These machines are effective in deceiving the enemy, and they protect the real equipment," the Rusbal plant director, Victor Talanov, told AFP.

"This kind of [technology](#) has existed in the army for a long time, since World War II," he said.

In another recent example, the Serbian army used similar decoys during the country's bombardment by NATO forces in 1999 and the Alliance actually destroyed fewer genuine targets than it thought.

Talanov said the idea to work for military belonged to his father, Rusbal's CEO who worked in the Soviet era for the military-industrial complex and later developed links with the Russian army.

"He realised that with these technologies, we can solve problems in the military field."



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Rusbal's proud employees said it's very difficult to distinguish a real tank from a fake one. For example, the equipment they produce has the same thermal footprint as the weapons it imitates.

"From the height of a 10-storey building, if a real tank and a false one stand side by side, they make almost no difference. Our machines emit the same heat and reflect radio waves in the same way as real ones," said Lyudmila Stepanova, Rusbal's chief technology expert.

Another bonus is that they are easy to deploy -- a tank inflates in minutes.

According to Rusbal, Russian technology of manufacturing fake weapons is far more innovative and developed than in other countries, such as China or Canada, which also use similar equipment.

A Russian-manufactured mock tank weighs only 90 kilograms against 300 kilograms for its European analogue.

"Before, we had to inflate a model and to bung it up like a mattress. Now, air is blown continuously into the tank. This allows us to use lighter materials, which inflate faster and are more resistant to cuts," Talanov said.

He has admitted having no information on how and where exactly the fake tanks are used by the military, but said he believes they are indeed used in conflict situations.

The Kremlin has vowed repeatedly to modernize its dilapidated military, equipped with aging and obsolete equipment.

In February Russia launched a \$650 billion rearmament plan to counter the West's military dominance by adding eight nuclear submarines and hundreds of warplanes to its creaking armed forces.

Last year Russia announced plans to triple its defence spending to 19 trillion rubles (613 billion dollars, 454 billion euros) over the next decade.

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