



# Russia's Spetsnaz to Get New "Flying Tank" Special Operations Helicopter

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to the accompanying passage from *Izvestia*, "Russia's Spetsnaz are to get a true 'flying tank' this year – a unique combat helicopter" that will transport the ground force, engage enemy aircraft, prep the landing zone, insert the ground force and then remain to provide immediate air cover. This heavily armed and armored 'flying tank' will be able to carry up to four extended-range Hermes [Hermes] missiles, up to eight supersonic Ataka missiles, or up to two tons of aviation bombs. It can even do Medevac after the fight. According to the passage, tests of the first prototypes of the new combat transport helicopter (with the designation Mi-8AMTSh-VN) are planned for the fall of 2020.

In discussing the new 'flying tank,' Colonel Valeriy Yuryev, deputy chair of the Russian Union of Paratroopers said, "The modern helicopter should have sufficient firepower, plenty of ammunition, and good transportation performance. Desirably, it would land a team and then, while the commandos are approaching their assigned location, start engaging targets. What we need is a kind of flying tank. That is more effective than having infantry fighting vehicles or tanks supporting the commandos – you see the situation better from the air. But an aircraft like that needs a fairly powerful engine."

The article notes that the Mil plant began to develop a helicopter for the Special Operations Forces in 2017. Then, in May 2018, the military authorized research and development on the project.

Flying a lift ship and flying a gunship are fundamentally similar, but there are also unique skills involved with each. Producing the aircraft seems complicated enough, but providing ample proficient pilots could be the real challenge. It will require a lot of flight and simulator hours to master all the aspects of this war bird. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“The legendary Mi-8 is going to be turned into a heavily armed and armored ‘flying tank.’ ”***

**Source:** Anton Lavrov, Roman Kretsul, Aleksei Ramm, "Spetsnaz To Get 'Flying Tank' - Combat Transport Helicopter Will not Only Carry Troops but Also Provide Supporting Fire", *Izvestia*, 15 January 2020. <https://iz.ru/955833/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/voina-i-mi-spetsnaz-poluchit-letaiushchii-tank>

## ***Spetsnaz to get 'Flying Tank' - Combat Transport Helicopter will not only transport troops but also provide supporting fire***

Russia's spetsnaz are to get a true "flying tank" this year – a unique combat helicopter with the designation Mi-8AMTSh-VN. Tests are scheduled for the fall. This innovative machine will transport spetsnaz and provide them with supporting fire. In its most heavily-armed version, it will carry up to four extended-range Hermes [Hermes] missiles, up to eight supersonic Ataka missiles, or up to two tons of aviation bombs. This payload will enable the helicopter to engage ground, maritime, and aerial targets at a range of up to 20 kilometers. Modern avionics, electro-optical systems, radar, and thermal imagers will ensure all-weather day and night operation. Special-purpose subunits have long needed a machine like this...

Tests of the first prototypes of the new combat transport helicopter are planned for the fall of 2020. They are likely to take place at the Army Aviation Flight Personnel Combat Training and Retraining Center at Torzhok...

In 2017, on its own initiative, the Mil plant began to develop a helicopter for the Special Operations Forces. In May 2018, the military authorized research and development on the project under the codename Sapsan [Peregrine Falcon]. More than 800 million rubles have been earmarked for the project. The military signed a contract for the first 10 aircraft with Mil [officially the Russian Helicopters Joint Stock Company] at the Army forum last summer.

The prototype, armed with rockets and bombs, should be completed early in 2020. A second prototype, carrying the full arsenal of guided missiles, is scheduled for delivery toward the end of the year.

The legendary Mi-8 is going to be turned into a heavily armed and armored "flying tank." With an increased payload, it will be noticeably heavier. Consequently, it will have a more powerful version of the engine currently on the Mi-8AMTSh.

The Sapsan will outgun even the existing assault helicopters. "Product 305" will be one of its weapon systems. Reportedly this is the codename for the Hermes-A advanced missile, with an extended range of up to 20 kilometers. That is twice as far as any other helicopter-borne antitank guided missile currently in service with the Aerospace Forces. Fitting these weapons to the upgraded Ka-52M and Mi-28NM helicopters is still in the planning stage.

Colonel Valeriy Yuryev, deputy chair of the Russian Union of Paratroopers, stated that a "multirole helicopter combining a wide range of combat and assault landing capabilities is vital for special operations and spetsnaz subunits. In Afghanistan, Mi-8s would deliver troops to their destination and depart. Cover would usually be provided by a pair of Mi-24 helicopters flying a race-track pattern. The modern helicopter should have sufficient firepower, plenty of ammunition, and good transportation performance. Desirably, it would land a team and then, while the commandos are approaching their assigned location, start engaging targets. What we need is a kind of flying tank. That is more effective than having infantry fighting vehicles or tanks supporting the commandos – you see the situation better from the air. But an aircraft like that needs a fairly powerful engine..."

Apart from the long-range Hermes, the new Sapsan will be able to use the 9M120 Ataka antitank guided missile usually found on assault helicopters, with a shaped-charge, high explosive fragmentation, or thermobaric warhead. These have a range of about six kilometers.

Apart from guided missiles, the Mi-8AMTSh-VN will carry the standard complement of free-flight rocket pods, heavy machine guns, and underslung cannon and grenade launcher pods. It will be able to use aviation bombs weighing from 50 to 500 kilograms [110 to 1100 pounds].

In its most heavily-armed version, the helicopter will carry up to four long-range Hermes missiles, up to eight Atakas, or up to 2 tons of bombs. One option is to have mounting points for four advanced Verba close-quarter air-to-air missiles.

The Sapsan's cargo cabin will have quick-release detachable armor to protect against small arms fire. The serial-production Mi-8AMTSh has protection only for the pilots, rear machine gunner, and vital systems, but in the new version the commandos will also have armor protection.

The helicopter's ability to operate at any time of day or night and in any weather comes from the GOES-321MK advanced electro-optical surveillance station with thermal imaging. This is currently fitted to the Mi-35 assault helicopter. The Mi-35 OPS-24N-IL target sighting system with laser missile guidance will enable the new helicopter to use all of its impressive complement of guided missiles.

All the electronic warfare equipment will be brought together by the IBKV-17VP onboard system. The cockpit on this modernized Mi-8, as appropriate for a modern helicopter, is fully glazed with four large multipurpose indicator lights. The instruments have been adapted for use with night sight devices.

An L370V35MS electro-optical jamming station derived from the Vitebsk family is likely to be fitted, to protect against portable SAMs. Optional equipment includes a device to receive and process data from drones, a radar station, and a radar detector.