

English Transcript

Russian tactics: To drive the Ukrainians out of our territories



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0dhSiQ6_2w

[Editor's note: Vitaliy Portnikov is one of Ukraine's leading journalists and thinkers. We offer an excerpt from a talk show that appeared in Ukrainian on Lviv-based NTA television station on 22 March 2022.]

Host: Mr. Portnikov, at the beginning of the program, when there was an air-raid siren and [we were] in a bomb shelter, we talked about the idea of a referendum, which the mass media started bandying about. We are all waiting for the day of victory. We are convinced that we will be victorious. My question is probably more about the worldview but still... In your understanding, what is the concept of victory today? Does it mean reverting to the situation we had on 24 February 2022 when there were the so-called LNR and DNR, but it was quiet in the rest of the territory? Or does it mean regaining control over Donetsk, Luhansk, and the rest of Ukraine? Or [does it mean that] the empire falls and Japan then captures the territories it claims, and we recapture ours? The concept of victory — what is it?

V.P.: You know, for me, the concept of Ukraine's victory is a clear understanding that no new attacks will be launched against Ukraine from the territory of the Russian Federation. This is only possible when the current political regime in Russia is destroyed.

I'm not going to speak about what will happen after that and whether this will be one united Russian Federation in some shape and form — strong or weak, democratic; I don't know — or whether it will be a network of some states in the territory of the Russian Federation. This is, again, something I cannot know. But what I clearly understand is that as long as Vladimir Putin's regime exists, any security for the Ukrainian state is out of the question.

We clearly understand what Putin's political goals are — the restoration of the former USSR in its entire territory, from Uzhgorod to Ashgabat. This is what Putin is doing now. We often say, as we have done just now, that Putin is a madman and doesn't know what he is doing. I am one of those people who do not consider him a madman. I clearly understand what he is doing. I can see perfectly well the logic of his actions. Similarly, I don't think Lukashenko is crazy, either. I fully understand what he is doing, and I see the logic of his actions. This logic is clear to me.

I see the logic of a Blitzkrieg. He has miscalculated, and now there is new logic. It's simple — forcing Ukrainians out of the territory where they live. Russia has seen that Ukrainians are not welcoming the Russian army with flowers and that they are ready to resist. So, a new stage has begun, namely mass destruction of the Ukrainian infrastructure and Ukrainian cities.

We say: "It's a war crime." Obviously! But from Putin's viewpoint, it's cleansing the territory of disloyal elements. This will continue as long as Putin has the possibility of doing it. He will destroy as many Ukrainian factories, cities, and bridges as he can, and it will be a victory if we stop that. This is the first point. Here is the second point. Lukashenko...

Host: This is important. We've been talking about this. Will he dare move his troops into [Ukraine]?

V.P.: This is a question, not for him. He may be given a task of cutting off the supply lines for the Ukrainian army in the west. If he fails to worm his way out of it, he will do it, because his political regime is totally dependent on Putin's support. If Putin denies him this support, there will be no Lukashenko in 48 hours. The Russian troops stationed there will simply arrange a heart attack for him or will find another Lukashenko. This is also something we need to understand.

Lukashenko doesn't rely on popular support, just like Putin. They both rely on the military-security apparatus — one on his own, while the other one on that of a neighboring country. So, anything is possible.

I always say: Listen, we are discussing a virtual agenda: a referendum; that we are stopping the Russian troops; that they are digging in and stopping on our borderlines; a meeting

between Putin and Zelensky; negotiations. This is the agenda which does not exist in nature. What exists in nature is a simple "special operation." [This is] Putin's operation to force the Ukrainian population out of Ukraine. This is the so-called "final solution of the Ukrainian question," and this is what we should proceed from.

You see, a victory means stopping this thing. We have just had a woman from Mariupol, and she has told us how it happens. It's absolutely logical. Mariupol must become empty, then Mykolaiv, and then, if [Russia] is successful, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, etc. And then, of course — we need to understand this — the next city to become empty is the capital of Ukraine. It must be stripped of its citizens.

What are we seeing now? The shelling of Kyiv's residential areas has started. They will keep destroying Kyiv as long as they have the power to. They have now started from the suburbs [but] will certainly be destroying downtown Kyiv to make Ukrainians scared. Those who still remain in Kyiv must leave the city. And so it will continue.

So, what is victory? Stopping them, right? They must be stopped because a moment will come when, in a large swath of Ukrainian territory, there will be no people left in cities. And there will be mass terror in villages, which they are engaging in now. You know this. They come into villages and perpetrate terror.

Host: We have heard these horrible stories.

V.P.: Let me repeat: we call these war crimes. The Holodomor could also be called exactly that. It was a crime but an absolutely logical crime. From the perspective of Stalin's regime, it was the perfectly right thing to do — breaking the backbone of the Ukrainian nation itself. What is Putin doing now? He wants to break the backbone of the Ukrainian nation itself. The year 1933 is being repeated. And that's no joke. This is not some unconscious bombing and shelling along some obscure trajectories. No. The trajectories are clear. He is targeting Ukrainians.