

Rozhovor s generálem Valerijem Zalužným, velitelem ukrajinských ozbrojených sil

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Evropa | Jeho vlastními slovy

Upravené hlavní body našeho rozhovoru

15. prosince 2022

Toto jsou upravené nejdůležitější momenty našeho rozhovoru s generálem Valerijem Zalužným ze 3. prosince 2022. Začal svým osobním pohledem na válku. (Můžete si také přečíst upravené nejdůležitější momenty našeho rozhovoru s Volodymyrem Zelenským, prezidentem Ukrajiny.)

Valerij Zalužnyj: Pro nás, pro armádu, válka začala v roce 2014. Pro mě osobně v červenci 2014. A to jsem v roce 2014 vůbec netušil, co to válka byla.

Přečetl jsem spoustu knih, všechny akademie jsem absolvoval se zlatou medailí, všemu jsem teoreticky rozuměl, ale nechápal jsem, co vlastně válka znamená. Ale v osmi letech války, do roku 2022, jsem

to já i lidé jako já chápali všechno dokonale.

Všechno, co jsme udělali, když začala rozsáhlá agrese, bylo implementovat nejen naše znalosti, které jsme měli již v roce 2014, ale také dovednosti a zkušenosti, které jsme od té doby získali. A nejdůležitější zkušenost, kterou jsme měli a kterou jsme praktikovali téměř jako náboženství, je, že Rusové a ostatní nepřátelé musí být zabiti, prostě zabiti, a hlavně bychom se neměli bát to udělat. A to je to, co děláme.

Valery Zaluzhny: „Zabíjení nepřátel“

0:07

Vše, co se stalo 24. února, byl nárůst rozsahu. Předtím jsme měli vpředu 403 km a 232 pevných bodů. A do 24. února tato fronta narostla na 2 500 km. A byli jsme relativně malá síla, ale zapojili jsme se. Přirozeně jsme pochopili, že nejsme dost silní. Naším úkolem bylo rozložit naše menší síly tak, abychom využili nekonvenční taktiky k zastavení náporu.

The Economist: Co vás jako velitele odlišuje?

VZ : Sovětská armáda uvítala a prosadila jeden koncept: velitele. Být velitelem a být vůdcem však není totéž. Při vší úctě k panu Surovikinovi [veliteli ruských sil na Ukrajině], když se na něj podíváte, je to obyčejný petrovský velitel z doby Petra Velikého, řekněme, *deržimorda* [brutální martinet v Gogolově „Vládě Inspektor“].

Podíváte se na něj a pochopíte, že buď splníte úkol, nebo jste v prdeli. A už dávno jsme si uvědomili, že to nefunguje. A to jsme si uvědomili zvláště v roce 2014, kdy 21letí poručíci přišli velet padesáti a šedesátiletým mužům. Samozřejmě jsme měli vlastní *deržimordy*, kteří se snažili udržovat pořádek pěstmi a bicepsy, ale v ukrajinské armádě to na 100 % nefunguje... Vždy je možné být normální. Být normální znamená zůstat člověkem v jakékoli situaci – to je

nejdůležitější. Zůstat člověkem, stát se vůdcem. Být chytřejší, silnější, talentovanější a v tom případě se snažit řídit lidi. To je náboženství, které jsem vyznával.

TE: Does this mean that you listen to your officers and encourage their initiative?

VZ: I trust my generals. Since the start of the war I fired ten of them because they were not up to it. Another one shot himself. I trust Syrsky [General Oleksandr Syrsky, commander of Ukraine's land forces]. If he tells me he needs another brigade, it means that he really needs another brigade. I certainly don't think I am the smartest one here. I must and do listen to those who are in the field. Because the initiative is there.

TE: Who is your military role model?

VZ: Turn your head to the left. There is a portrait of the late Hennadiy Petrovich Vorobyov [commander of Ukraine's ground forces from 2009 to 2014]. He was a man who was enormously respected in the army. Why do I have it here? When I am at ease, when things are going well, this picture is usually lying face down, I don't need to look at it. When I have doubts about something, I put it up straight. I turn around and look at it, trying to figure out what Hennadiy Vorobyov would do in this situation. This is a man who has been successful. This is a man who had a hard time, because he helped everyone. Everyone. He knew everyone in the Armed Forces, their wives, their children, their nephews and so on. It was hard for him, but he took that heavy burden and carried it. That's the model.

TE: The photograph is up at the moment.

VZ: Yes. There are a lot of doubts.

TE: What kind?

VZ: We have already realised through a number of operations that the main thing is not to be afraid of this enemy. It can be fought, it must be fought today, here and now. And in no way should that be postponed until tomorrow, because there will be problems. In order to achieve this, you need resources. Just like the Russians, when we are planning something we must have the resources to do it. Then, if your position is correct and you make the right decisions, you can expect the right result.

The Russians have been garnering their resources for a long time. According to my calculations it must have been three and a half or four years that they built them up intensively: people, equipment, ammunition. I think they had three months' worth of resources to achieve their goals. The fact that they have exhausted these resources and wasted their potential without achieving practically any result, shows that their position was chosen incorrectly. They now have to think again about how to get out of this situation.

They wanted to take Kyiv. Militarily this was the right decision—the easiest way to achieve their goal. I would have done the same. I know Gerasimov [the head of Russia's armed forces] well (not personally, of course). There was no way out for him. He concentrated on Donbas to preserve whatever resources he had left. As of today, the situation in Donbas is not easy. But strategically it is a no-win situation for the Russian army.

So most likely they are looking for ways to stop [fighting] and get a pause by any means: shelling civilians, leaving our wives and children to freeze to death. They need it for one simple purpose: they need time to gather resources and create new potential so they can continue to fulfil their goals.

But they are working on another task in parallel, they are doing everything possible not to let us regroup and strike ourselves. This is why you are seeing battles along the 1,500km frontline. In some places more intense, in some places less intense, but they are

constraining our troops in order not to allow us to regroup. The fact that they are fighting hard now is very bad, of course. But it is not a solution to the strategic problem. It simply wears down the armed forces of Ukraine.

That's why, just as during the second world war, I have no doubt about it, it is most likely that somewhere beyond the Urals, they are preparing new resources. They are 100% being prepared.

Ammunition is being prepared, not very good stuff, but still. It won't be the same resources as it could have been in two years of ceasefire. It will not be like that. It will be lousy, and combat potential will be very, very low, even if he enlists a million more people in the army to throw bodies, like Zhukov [a senior Soviet commander during the second world war] did, it will not bring the desired result anyway.

So the next problem that we have is, first of all, to hold this line and not lose any more ground. It's crucial. Because I know that it is ten to 15 times harder to liberate it than not to surrender it. So our task now is to hold on. Our task is to monitor very clearly with the help of our partners what is going on there, where they are getting ready. This is our strategic task.

Our second strategic task is to get ready for this war which can happen in February. To be able to wage a war with fresh forces and reserves. Our troops are all tied up in battles now, they are bleeding. They are bleeding and are being held together solely by courage, heroism and the ability of their commanders to keep the situation under control.

The second, very important strategic task for us is to create reserves and prepare for the war, which may take place in February, at best in March, and at worst at the end of January. It may start not in Donbas, but in the direction of Kyiv, in the direction of Belarus, I do not rule out the southern direction as well.

We have made all the calculations—how many tanks, artillery we need and so on and so on. This is what everyone needs to concentrate on right now. May the soldiers in the trenches forgive me, it's more important to focus on the accumulation of resources right now for the more protracted and heavier battles that may begin next year. I'll be talking to Milley [America's top soldier] about this [later today].

Valery Zaluzhny: "Heavier battles to come"

0:16

I will tell him how much it is worth, how much it costs. If we don't get it, of course we will fight to the end. But as a movie character said, "I don't vouch for the consequences." The consequences are not hard to foresee. This is what we have to do.

There is also a third, very important task for us, a third strategic task, which, unfortunately, is connected with the first (holding the lines and positions) and with the second (accumulating resources). This is missile defence and air defence. In my personal opinion, I am not an energy expert but it seems to me we are on the edge. We are balancing on a fine line. And if [the power grid] is destroyed...that is when soldiers' wives and children start freezing. And such a scenario is possible. What kind of mood the fighters will be in, can you imagine? Without water, light and heat, can we talk about preparing reserves to keep fighting?

TE: Do you need to conduct another wave of mobilisation?

VZ: We are already conducting it as it is. We have enough people, and I can clearly see what I have. I have enough. I don't need hundreds of thousands more.

We need tanks, we need APCs [armoured personnel carriers], infantry fighting vehicles. And we need ammunition. Please note, I'm not talking about F-16s right now.

TE: Have the Russian forces adapted to HIMARS [American-made multiple rocket launchers]?

VZ: Yes. They've gone to a distance the HIMARS can't reach. And we haven't got anything longer-range.

TE: Can we talk about air defence?

VZ: Now we have a ratio of 0.76. Russians are using this 0.76 coefficient of efficacy when they plan their attacks. This means that instead of 76 missiles, they launch 100. And 24 get through and reach their target. And what do two missiles do to a power station? It won't work for two years. So it has to be built up.

NATO specialists know everything, absolutely everything, down to the last detail. Calculations are done and thank God it all has moved on. We already have some NASAMS [Norwegian-American air-defence systems]. Not enough, but some. IRIS-T [a German air-defence system] are already in use. Not enough, but some. They just need to be ramped up. We need dozens of those.

TE: Are your allies holding you back in any way from advancing on Crimea?

VZ: I can't answer the question of whether they are holding back or not. I will simply state the facts. In order to reach the borders of Crimea, as of today we need to cover a distance of 84km to Melitopol. By the way, this is enough for us, because Melitopol would give us a full fire control of the land corridor, because from Melitopol we can already fire at the Crimean Isthmus, with the very same HIMARS and so on. Why am I saying this to you? Because it goes back to my earlier point about resources. I can calculate, based on the task at hand, what kind of resource is needed to build combat capability.

We are talking about the scale of World War One...that is what Antony Radakin [Britain's top soldier] told me. When I told him that the British Army fired a million shells in World War One, I was told,

“We will lose Europe. We will have nothing to live on if you fire that many shells.” When they say, “You get 50,000 shells”, the people who count the money faint. The biggest problem is that they really don’t have it.

With this kind of resources I can’t conduct new big operations, even though we are working on one right now. It is on the way, but you don’t see it yet. We use a lot fewer shells.

I know that I can beat this enemy. But I need resources. I need 300 tanks, 600-700 IFVs, 500 Howitzers. Then, I think it is completely realistic to get to the lines of February 23rd. But I can’t do it with two brigades. I get what I get, but it is less than what I need. It is not yet time to appeal to Ukrainian soldiers in the way that Mannerheim appealed to Finnish soldiers. We can and should take a lot more territory.

TE: What do you make of Russia’s mobilisation?

VZ: Russian mobilisation has worked. It is not true that their problems are so dire that these people will not fight. They will. A tsar tells them to go to war, and they go to war. I’ve studied the history of the two Chechen wars—it was the same. They may not be that well equipped, but they still present a problem for us. We estimate that they have a reserve of 1.2m-1.5m people... The Russians are preparing some 200,000 fresh troops. I have no doubt they will have another go at Kyiv. ■7

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