

## Arcanum in the news

# The Washington Post

### FORMER VIRGINIA GOVERNOR TERRY MCAULIFFE VISITS FRONT LINE IN UKRAINE

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KYIV, Ukraine – Former Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe was just a few miles from the front line in eastern Ukraine this month when he climbed into an underground command bunker and watched live on a drone feed as Ukrainian troops struck a Russian tank moving nearby.

“We watched them get ’em with the drone. We watched ’em call in the fire, watched ’em destroy the tank,” McAuliffe, who is also a former Democratic National Committee chairman, recalled in an interview from the Ukrainian capital a few days later. “We saw three guys running into a trench ... whoosh!”

McAuliffe, 66, was in Ukraine on what he described as a personal “fact-finding mission” and a political rival might call a risky foray into war tourism: a seven-day trip in which he traveled some 1,900 miles by road from Poland to Kyiv to front-line regions in the east and south and back again.

The goal, he said, was to raise awareness about the real toll of the war among policymakers and business owners in the United States who might then ramp up their support for Ukraine's war and rebuilding efforts. The material also proved useful in a conversation with [Christiane Amanpour on CNN](#) and in an interview with The Washington Post.

Traveling as a private citizen, McAuliffe said, allowed him the freedom to "go anywhere I wanted ... talk to anyone I wanted," unlike visiting U.S. officials constrained – and protected – by protocol and safety regulations.

"I said, if I'm going, I want to see it all, so I can go back and tell everybody, 'Here is the best thing to do,'" he said. "And I also want to go to the front."

McAuliffe, a former businessman and a mega-fundraiser for President Bill Clinton, went on to become power player in Democratic politics. He served as governor from 2014 to 2018, lost a bid to get the job back in 2021 and briefly harbored presidential aspirations in 2020. He does not currently hold any office, though [he has been rumored](#) to be up for a top job in the Biden administration. Last year, President Biden appointed McAuliffe's wife, Dorothy, as the State Department's special representative for global partnerships – a role in which she oversees public-private partnerships that advance U.S. interests.

McAuliffe had Biden's strong backing in his 2021 race (consecutive terms are barred in Virginia) but lost to Republican Glenn Youngkin. McAuliffe then raised millions for Democratic candidates in the 2022 midterms through his PAC, called Common Good Virginia.

Last month, the McAuliffes joined the Clintons in Belfast at a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement that brought an end to the period of sectarian violence known as the Troubles. They were also on the guest list for a December state dinner with French President Emmanuel Macron in Washington. There has been speculation that President Biden may one day tap him for a Cabinet position or ambassadorship.

McAuliffe said he was not in Ukraine at the behest of Biden or any official – but that he “told friends I was coming” and when he returned, planned “to let everybody know everything I saw.”

The trip to an active war zone was highly unusual. It was planned after a chance encounter at a party at the French ambassador’s residence in Washington in January, he said. In attendance was Veronika Velch, a Ukrainian public affairs specialist who works for the Washington firm Ridgely Walsh, which [registered last year to lobby](#) as a foreign agent for Ukraine.

Velch’s husband, Oleg Sentsov, is a prominent Ukrainian filmmaker and writer [who was arrested](#) by Russian forces in Crimea in 2014 and later went on hunger strike in a Russian prison. He was released in a 2019 exchange and is now fighting in Ukraine.

“We started talking about Ukraine,” McAuliffe said. “And I kept saying, what do you need?”

Velch traveled with McAuliffe. The trip and the convoy’s security were organized and funded by Arcanum, a global intelligence firm that has been supporting Ukrainian forces, including the brigades McAuliffe visited.

McAuliffe arrived in Ukraine the first week of May as Russia ramped up its strikes on the capital.

His first night in Kyiv, as he settled into a hotel in the center of the city, air raid sirens went off and Ukrainian air defenses activated to intercept an incoming Russian assault. The security team he was traveling with had laid out a flak jacket and helmet on his bed, which he donned later on in the trip.

There were “all kinds of explosions in the air,” he said. “Needless to say, I didn’t go back to sleep.”

After sunrise, “we went out, I started walking around and it’s just like normal,” he said. “They live with this every single day. And that was amazing to me.”

In Kyiv, he met with government officials to discuss how Ukraine can rebuild its infrastructure damaged due to the Russian invasion – tapping, he said, into his experienced investing “billions on our rail or our roads” in Virginia.

“As one minister said to me: ‘Thanks for coming. We got to put the seeds down. We can’t wait till the war is over. We got to start doing this now,’” he said.

He also visited families displaced by the war and Ukrainian children who were forcibly separated from their families and moved to Russia. One mother, he said, recalled weeping as she watched her son board a bus to Russian territory. It would be six months before they were reunited.

“I asked him if he’d been abused at all,” McAuliffe said. “He said no. He said ... he saw one young girl get hit with an iron bar.”

McAuliffe continued: “You can come over here and see these little kids with their eyes wide as cue balls pleading just somebody help them. Oh! It’s gut-wrenching.”

The ex-governor then traveled south and east in a convoy that also delivered medical supplies to a stabilization point near the front line. At one point, he said, he came within 30 miles of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, where the U.N. nuclear watchdog has warned of potential for disaster. (“That was lit up at night,” he said.)

He said he met three battalion commanders who detailed their battlefield needs (“They want more of everything ... I did hear about the long range missiles. You hear that a lot in the field.”)

At one point, he said, their own convoy came under fire, with an explosive landing just 10 feet from the vehicle he was in.

In another incident, “we saw four HIMARS being launched right over our car,” he said, referring to an American precision-guided weapon system that Ukrainians are using on the front line.

“How many people get to see what I saw?” he asked. “We were attacked ... it’s real life.”

The experience, he said, left him more convinced than ever that the United States must continue arming and supporting Ukraine.

“You’ve got all these countries running away from democracy,” he said. “Here we’ve got a country that is embracing it.”

“We need to win this,” McAuliffe added. “No question about it.”