# Ukrainian military's reliance on Starlink raises concerns after communication breakdown



In a significant turn of events, a breakdown in communication affected Ukrainian military efforts during their campaign against Russian forces in October 2022. Ukrainian troops had been making considerable gains in both the eastern and southern fronts until operations faltered when they lost internet connectivity vital for coordination and artillery direction. The loss stemmed from a decision by Elon Musk, the owner of SpaceX and the provider of the Starlink satellite internet service, to cut off access to his system, which had been pivotal in restoring communications after Russian attacks had disrupted Ukraine’s traditional infrastructure.

The interruption, described by Ukrainian officials as 'catastrophic,' forced retreat and disarray among military ranks, prompting a swift response from the Pentagon, which arranged for a payment to Musk to restore access. In subsequent discussions, Musk asserted that Starlink had become the 'backbone of the Ukrainian army.' However, this prompted a defensive reaction from Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, who remarked that Poland had been funding the service at a cost of $50 million annually. He further noted that if SpaceX proved unreliable, alternative funding arrangements would need to be considered.

This recent exchange highlights the precarious position that Ukraine finds itself in regarding its dependency on Starlink. During a subsequent conversation on social media platform X, Musk reiterated that he would not disconnect Starlink services, despite the complexities that such a position entails. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio backed Musk, suggesting that no threats had been issued regarding the termination of services to Ukraine.

Musk's comments have garnered considerable attention given the context of his previous support for Ukraine. In early 2022, following the onset of the Russian invasion, Musk was quick to respond to a call for assistance from Ukraine’s Deputy Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, facilitating the rapid deployment of Starlink terminals to the country. As a result, about 150,000 Ukrainians were using the service daily within three months. The military reliance on Starlink has been profound; one soldier even characterised it as 'our oxygen,' stating that its absence could plunge the army into chaos.

Despite its advantages, such as resilience against enemy countermeasures and low orbiting satellites for reduced latency, there are increasing concerns regarding the safety and reliability of outsourcing critical communications to a single commercial entity. Defence experts believe that while the Ukrainian military would not collapse instantly without Starlink, its operational capabilities would face severe challenges without it.

In light of these developments, Ukraine is reportedly exploring other options for satellite communications, albeit recognising that alternative systems may not offer the same levels of speed and effectiveness. The events surrounding Starlink also reflect broader apprehensions among sovereign states about relying on the capabilities of private companies, especially given Musk's complex relationships with various international actors, including China.

As the situation evolves, the implications of Musk's approach to Ukraine's communication needs appear increasingly consequential for both military operations and international relations. Asia-Pacific nations, including Taiwan, are also reconsidering their own communication strategies, choosing to engage with alternative service providers for greater stability in their operational frameworks. Meanwhile, SpaceX’s Starlink continues to significantly impact both military and civilian communications worldwide, operating in over 100 countries and expecting substantial revenue in the coming years despite criticism from various circles, including astronomers and environmentalists.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Ukraine_cyberattacks> - This URL supports the information about the Russian cyberattacks on Ukraine, including the disruption of traditional internet infrastructure, which necessitated the use of Starlink for military communications.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Starlink> - This URL provides background information on Starlink, its capabilities, and its role in providing internet connectivity, which is crucial for Ukraine's military operations.
* <https://www.espi.or.at/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ESPI-Report-84.pdf> - This report from the European Space Policy Institute discusses the cybersecurity challenges faced by Ukraine during the war, including the reliance on satellite communications like Starlink.
* <https://cloud.google.com/blog/topics/threat-intelligence/sandworm-disrupts-power-ukraine-operational-technology/> - This article highlights the broader context of cyberattacks in Ukraine, including those targeting critical infrastructure, which underscores the importance of reliable communication systems like Starlink.
* <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/elon-musk-says-starlink-will-not-block-ukraine-access-2023-10-14/> - This news article supports the claim that Elon Musk assured Ukraine of continued Starlink access despite previous concerns about service interruptions.