

War in Ukraine

Ukrainian forces report Starlink outages during push against Russia

Some SpaceX devices stopped working when soldiers liberated territory, Kyiv officials say



Ukrainian soldiers ride on an armoured vehicle near the recently retaken town of Lyman © Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

Mehul Srivastava and **Roman Olearchyk** in Kyiv, **Felicia Schwartz** in Washington, **Christopher Miller** in London YESTERDAY

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Ukrainian troops have reported outages of their Starlink communication devices on the frontline, hindering efforts to liberate territory from Russian forces, according to its officials and soldiers.

Thousands of Starlink terminals, which are made by Elon Musk-owned SpaceX, were donated by the company, purchased by the US government or crowdfunded by donors to help Ukrainian troops operate drones, receive vital intelligence updates and communicate with each other in areas where there are no other secure networks. The systems which connect a small antenna to a 35-centimetre-high terminal also provide internet for Ukrainian civilians.*

Some of the outages led to a “catastrophic” loss of communication in recent weeks, said one senior Ukrainian government official with direct knowledge of the issue. Many were reported as soldiers breached the frontline into Russian-controlled territory and some during pitched battles, the official said, speaking under the condition of anonymity.

They were acute in the south around the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, but also occurred along the frontline in eastern Kharkiv. Donetsk and Luhansk. the official

said.

All four regions are the focus of an intense Ukrainian counteroffensive and were claimed last month by President Vladimir Putin as part of Russia after [referendums](#) staged by Kremlin proxies.

Another Kyiv official said the connection failures were widespread and prompted panicked calls from soldiers to helplines. Both Ukrainian officials said the problems occurred when soldiers liberated territory from Russia and moved past the frontline.

The disruptions underline the outsized role of Musk's communications systems in the battlefield as Ukraine's counteroffensives in the east and south of the country push the Russians into retreat. The US-based entrepreneur angered Kyiv last weekend when he outlined a ceasefire plan that would result in ceding Ukrainian territory to Russia.

Roman Sinicyn, a co-ordinator at the Serhiy Prytula Charity, a foundation that donates Starlink systems to the Ukrainian armed forces, said the problem may be occurring because SpaceX was trying to prevent its misuse by Russian forces.

The blackouts were being experienced in areas so recently regained that their liberations had "not been made public yet", he said.

"It is absolutely clear to me that this is being done by representatives of Starlink to prevent the usage of their technology by Russian occupation forces," Sinicyn said. The Ukrainian military and SpaceX need to co-ordinate more closely, he said.

Musk and SpaceX did not respond to requests for comment. After this article was first published, Musk [said](#) on Twitter: "As for what's happening on the battlefield, that's classified."

He said "only a small percentage" of the Starlink terminals and services provided to Ukraine were purchased, adding: "This operation has cost SpaceX \$80M & will exceed \$100M by end of year."

Oleksiy Reznikov, Ukraine's defence minister, declined to comment. A spokesperson for General Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, declined to comment.

Three soldiers operating on the frontline confirmed their Starlink systems stopped working during battles. Several terminals have not worked in recent days in newly liberated areas near Kharkiv where Ukrainians pushed east towards the Luhansk

region, according to one of the soldiers, who is part of a special forces unit fighting in the area.

But two other Ukrainian military sources said earlier this week that their Starlink systems were functioning in newly-liberated territory east of Izyum and in the southern Kherson region.



Two western officials said they were aware of outages, but declined to comment further, including on their location.

Musk gave a boost to Kyiv in the early days of Russia's full-scale [invasion of Ukraine](#) by allowing his Starlink satellites to broadcast in the country, helping the army circumvent Moscow's internet cut-off.

But this week he triggered outrage among Ukrainians and their allies by suggesting

the borders between Russia and Ukraine be decided by new referendums. He also said he recognised the Crimean peninsula that Moscow unilaterally annexed in 2014, and said he believed Russian-speaking areas of eastern Ukraine “prefer Russia”.

In 2021 Musk spoke via video link at a conference organised by Sergei Kirienko, Putin’s domestic policy chief in charge of Russia’s assimilation of the annexed territories. On Wednesday Musk wrote in a tweet that he had spoken to the Russian president last year.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Thursday declined to comment on Musk’s video meeting with Putin and said he was not aware of Starlink being accessible in Russia.

Additional reporting by Max Seddon in Riga and Richard Waters in San Francisco

**This article has been amended to reflect that some of the Starlink terminals were donated to Ukraine by SpaceX*

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