

Zelensky Lashes Out After Starlink Cuts Off Ukrainian Drones

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Global Research, February 10, 2023

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Region: [Europe](#)

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Elon Musk's SpaceX has blocked the Ukrainian government and its military from using Starlink technology to fly and control drones, after earlier in the war SpaceX gifted thousands of Starlink dishes to Ukraine to help the population stay connected to the internet.

SpaceX president Gwynne Shotwell in a statement asserted that Starlink technology was "never meant to be weaponized". According to [BBC](#), "She made reference to Ukraine's alleged use of Starlink to control drones, and stressed that the equipment had been provided for humanitarian use."

Shotwell confirmed that the 'surprise decision' was taken due to it never being the company's intent to allow Starlink to be used "for offensive purposes" in remarks given before a conference in Washington DC. Shotwell further said Ukraine had utilized the technology—

"in ways that were unintentional and not part of any agreement," according to [Reuters](#).

After Musk provided the Starlink systems, the Ukrainian military quickly became dependent on them given the extreme battlefield conditions, including damage to existent communications infrastructure and frequent power outages. Additionally the Russians would often jam signals, thus Starlink allowed Ukrainian troops to circumvent these factors.

The Wednesday announcement from SpaceX was met with anger in Kiev, after already there's been an avalanche of Ukrainian government criticism aimed at Musk personally over his '[Russia-Ukraine peace poll](#)' offered in October. As *Bloomberg* observed during that prior spat and tensions, Musk's tweets were "drawing the wrath of Ukrainians" merely for his proposing a negotiated solution which involved territorial concessions for the sake of lasting peace.

Zelensky's office issued a denunciation on Thursday, complaining that Musk's company has failed to understand or acknowledge Ukraine's right of self-defense in making the decision.

Presidential spokesman Mykhailo Podolyak suggested Musk is playing into Putin's hands, stating SpaceX must decide whether it's "on the side of the right to freedom" or "on the Russian Federation's side and its 'right' to kill and seize territories".

It must be remembered that soon after last year's Russian invasion, Ukrainian officials essentially begged Musk to come to the rescue. A direct plea by Ukraine's minister of digital transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, at the time resulted in confirmation from Musk himself: "Starlink service is now active in Ukraine," Musk affirmed in reply.

A year of ☐☐ resistance & companies have to decide:

-Either they are on the side of ☐☐ & the right to freedom, and don't seek ways to do harm.

-Or they are on RF's side & its "right" to kill & seize territories. [#SpaceX](#) (Starlink) & Mrs. [#Shotwell](#) should choose a specific option

— Михайло Подоляк (@Podolyak_M) [February 9, 2023](#)

But when tensions arose after Musk expressed 'unpopular' opinions regarding the war, including a plea for both sides to reach compromise rather than see the world spiral into WW3, the US-based billionaire asserted that he is 'obviously' pro-Ukraine given SpaceX had spent \$80 million on Starlink in the country, or essentially a massive wartime donation.

Musk recently pointed out he's "damned if you do, damned if you don't" when it comes to SpaceX policy in Ukraine...

SpaceX Starlink has become the connectivity backbone of Ukraine all the way up to the front lines. This is the damned if you do part.

However, we are not allowing Starlink to be used for long-range drone strikes. This is the damned if you don't part.

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [January 31, 2023](#)

From there, a debate ensued over whether the Pentagon would foot the bill for further Starlink development and maintenance in the country. The systems were increasingly seen as essential to the Ukrainian military's effective operations if it hoped to push back Russia. However, Musk acknowledged that his company couldn't just keep picking up the tab 'indefinitely'.

But after all of this, Ukrainian officials alongside pundits in the West echoed tired old Russiagate-style smears of Musk somehow being ["Putin's puppet"](#). Some mainstream publications [went so far as to claim](#) Musk was receiving orders from the Kremlin, at a moment the controversy reached the height of absurdity.

Fuck off is my very diplomatic reply to you [@elonmusk](#)

— Andrij Melnyk (@MelnykAndrij) [October 3, 2022](#)

A low point was reached in the October saga when Ukraine's ambassador to Germany told Musk to "fuck off" in a reply on Twitter. And yet, awkwardly despite these intense public attacks the Ukrainian government has of necessity remained heavily reliant on the services Musk provides.

It goes without saying that Ukraine's government might want to be careful about biting the hand that feeds it. Without doubt, SpaceX has the capability to further reduce Kiev's military reliance on the technology, which again the company has stressed was only meant for humanitarian purposes.

After all, Starlink + armed drones?...

Becuase if you did allow it, Starlink becomes SkyNet...☐

— Jon Nicosia (@NewsPolitics) [January 31, 2023](#)

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