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Ukraine Advances in Zaporizhzhia After Russian Troops Lose Starlink Access – NATO Official

By Charlie Hancock

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A Ukrainian serviceman stands next to the antenna of the Starlink satellite-based broadband system.
Yasuyoshi Chiba / AFP

BRUSSELS — Ukrainian forces have made gains in the southern Zaporizhzhia region after Russian units lost access to Starlink, a senior NATO official said.

Elon Musk's SpaceX disconnected Starlink terminals near the front lines this month after a request from Ukraine, which said Russian forces were using the satellite internet system to direct its units on the battlefield.

Starlink does not provide services in Russia, but some frontline units have managed to use the internet system to receive commands, coordinate their offensive and pilot drones.

"Taking that link away has put the Russians in somewhat of a command and control

predicament," the official told reporters ahead of a meeting of NATO defense ministers. "Whatever alternative Russia comes up with is probably not going to be quite as effective."

Related article: Pro-War Bloggers Report Starlink Outage on Ukrainian Front Line

Moscow's efforts to develop a home-grown alternative network of low-orbit satellites have been beset with delays. Plans to launch the first 16 of a planned 300 satellites were pushed back from the end of 2025 into 2026.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, did not specify how much of Ukraine's recent gains could be directly attributed to the loss of Starlink access.

Both Russia and Ukraine claim to have made gains in the Zaporizhzhia region in recent days, with Ukraine's armed forces claiming Wednesday to have regained the village of Kosivtseve.

But the spokesman for Ukraine's Southern Defense Forces played down claims by Russian military bloggers that Kyiv had launched a broader counteroffensive in the region, saying that Ukraine's targeting of Russian infiltration groups did not amount to a full counteroffensive.

Spokesman Vladyslav Voloshin suggested that Russian units might be overexaggerating Ukraine's gains to cover for their own false reports to their superiors, including claiming to have captured the village of Ternuvate after only briefly deploying a small number of troops there.

Russian military bloggers started reporting problems with Starlink terminals on the evening of Feb. 4.

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