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Ukraine Sidesteps Starlink Throttling With Crimea Bridge Strike

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A drone view of a damaged Crimea bridge in the Kerch Strait. **Volodymyr Zelensky via Telegram / Handout via REUTERS**

Ukraine struck the bridge linking Russia to annexed Crimea without using Elon Musk's Starlink satellite networks, Britain's The Times newspaper reported Tuesday, citing an unidentified military officer involved in the operation.

The Kerch Bridge's main road arch crumbled into the sea after two drone and missile attacks in as many days. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called it retaliation for Russian strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Zelensky criticized SpaceX's speed restrictions on its military-grade Starshield satellite terminals for the second time in as many months, arguing that the limits hampered Ukraine's military capabilities, including air defense capabilities against Russian drones.

A Ukrainian officer quoted by The Times said the Kerch Bridge strike proved that Kyiv no longer needs to rely on Starshield networks for these types of missions.

“For the first time in history, we used all these drones to pass video signals to missiles so they could hit precise points on the bridge. We showed we can conduct such operations without Starlink,” the officer said.

“The Americans tried to paralyze our connectivity to conduct such operations, but this mission proved we can develop our own connections to relay radio signals,” he added.

Zelensky said the strike followed an unprecedented operation that methodically destroyed Russian air defenses, radar systems and electronic warfare capabilities.

Zelensky said the final stage was the decisive one. Palianytsia drones hit the road section of the bridge, while the rail section was hit by Neptune missiles and by Ruta and FP-5 drones.

Zelensky said Ukrainian forces carried out a precision-guided strike using Flamingo missiles, with the communications uplink working “flawlessly until the very last seconds.”

Related article: Ukraine Strikes Crimean Bridge for Second Day as Russia Pounds Kyiv Bridges

The 19-kilometer (12-mile) bridge is a flagship project inaugurated by Putin in 2018 and a symbol of Russia's attachment to the peninsula it captured and annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The bridge over the Kerch Strait was once a key supply route for Russian forces in Ukraine, but the military now relies more heavily on a land corridor running through parts of eastern and southern Ukraine that Russia has captured since launching a full-scale war with its neighbor in 2022.

Ukraine has attacked the bridge several times during the war. A truck bomb in October 2022 killed four people and limited the bridge's capacity for months. In July 2023, a section of the road bridge was destroyed, and a couple crossing by car were killed.

The Kremlin has vowed to rebuild the span “even better than before.” But Russian military bloggers and other experts said repairs would be challenging given Ukraine's capacity for further attacks.

The timing was awkward for the Kremlin leader ahead of his meeting in Shenzhen on Thursday with U.S. President Donald Trump and China's Xi Jinping, where the three are expected to discuss the Ukraine war among other topics.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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