

United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

October 22, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Hegseth,

On October 13, the Ukrainian military's access to SpaceX's Starshield satellite communications service was restricted without notice, reportedly at the direction of SpaceX CEO Elon Musk.¹ This decision to limit critical technology for a key ally not only put Ukrainian forces at risk and their people in peril, but raises serious questions about who controls critical capabilities the U.S. government has spent billions of dollars to procure, how decisions to restrict it are made, and whether the Department of Defense's ("DoD") reliance on SpaceX could expose U.S. forces to similar disruptions.² The Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (the "Subcommittee") is opening an inquiry into the U.S. Government's interaction with and reliance upon SpaceX technology, including Starlink satellite services and Starshield. Accordingly, I write to request information and documents regarding not just the decision to limit Ukraine's access to Starshield, but DoD's reliance on Starlink and Starshield technology to support military operations and protect our own national security.

In the late evening of October 13, Ukrainian forces lost critical access to Starshield—the military-grade counterpart to SpaceX's Starlink network—after their access to speeds at which

¹ Erin Banco & Gram Slattery, *Order to Limit Starshield Came from Inside White House*, REUTERS (Oct. 15, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/order-limit-starshield-ukraine-came-inside-white-house-sources-say-2026-10-15/>; Alexander Ward, *Natalie Andrews & Josh Dawsey, Musk Ordered Starlink Slowdown That Blindsided Ukraine*, WALL ST. J. (Oct. 21, 2026), <https://www.wsj.com/world/ukraine-starlink-elon-musk-trump-dbc49193>.

² Constant Méheut, *Ukraine's Exposure Grows as Satellite Use Is Restricted and Russia Escalates*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 15, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/14/world/europe/ukraine-starlink-energy.html>; see David Jeans, *Starlink Outage Hit Drone Tests, Exposing Pentagon's Growing Reliance on SpaceX*, REUTERS (Apr. 16, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/starlink-outage-hit-drone-tests-exposing-pentagons-growing-reliance-spacex-2026-04-16/>.

equipment could stay connected to the network was capped.³ According to Ukrainian officials, devices using Starshield services stopped functioning properly when mounted on drones and other fast-moving platforms, all while Russia unleashed dozens of ballistic missiles across the country.⁴ Ukraine said it received no advance warning and that several missions failed as a result.⁵ On October 19, President Zelenskyy confirmed to me on a call that access to critical Starlink services remains degraded, including for systems traveling at speeds above 100 miles per hour, impairing Ukraine's ability to intercept Russian drones.

The public record now contains conflicting accounts of both who ordered the restriction and who implemented it. Early reporting initially attributed the restriction to SpaceX. On October 14, however, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, asserted that Starshield systems are "owned and controlled by the US government," and that limits on their use are set by the U.S. military and, ultimately, the President.⁶ On October 15, 2026, Reuters cited two U.S. officials in reporting that the order to limit Ukraine's Starshield service originated inside the White House and was conveyed to DoD leadership.⁷ A senior Ukrainian official told Reuters that Kyiv was informed it was a White House decision.⁸ However, a senior U.S. official, by contrast, said the President made no such request.⁹ On October 16, President Trump further denied that the United States imposed any limit on Ukraine's Starshield access, adding to the conflicting public accounts of what occurred.¹⁰ That same day, The Telegraph reported that it was SpaceX CEO Elon Musk who pitched President Trump on implementing a speed cap, and that the President subsequently

³ Ryan Mac, *What Is Starshield, SpaceX's Military-Grade Satellite Internet Service?*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 14, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/14/business/starshield-spacex-ukraine-starlink-satellites-musk.html>.

⁴ Yuliia Dysa & Dan Peleschuk, *Ukraine Says SpaceX Hampers Drones for Attack and Defence, as US Ties Fray*, REUTERS (Oct. 15, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/ukraine-accuses-spacex-crippling-drone-missions-ties-with-us-worsen-2026-10-14/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Elon Musk (@ElonMusk), X (Oct. 14, 2026), <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/2110445577184133456>.

⁷ Erin Banco & Gram Slattery, *Order to Limit Starshield Came from Inside White House*, REUTERS (Oct. 15, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/order-limit-starshield-ukraine-came-inside-white-house-sources-say-2026-10-15/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Kate Sullivan, Ellen Milligan & Sana Pashankar, *Trump Didn't Order Limits on Kyiv's SpaceX Access, US Says*, BLOOMBERG (Oct. 16, 2026), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-10-15/trump-didn-t-order-limits-on-kyiv-s-spacex-access-us-says>; see also Brady Knox, *Trump Says He Doesn't Know Who Ordered Starshield Throttle in Ukraine*, WASH. EXAMINER (Oct. 16, 2026), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/white-house/4769020/trump-unsure-who-ordered-starshield-throttle-ukraine/> (statement of President Donald Trump) ("Well, I don't know if it was anybody. It wasn't me. And I don't think it was Elon [Musk] either. And from what I understand, it's the same as it's always been.").

“agreed.”¹¹ New reporting now confirms that Mr. Musk spoke with the President and several other senior administration officials prior to and after imposing the speed cap.¹²

If accurate, these reports indicate that a taxpayer funded military communications capability was degraded for an American ally in active combat, without notice, through a decision process that remains unclear even to the officials involved. These claims raise further questions about the respective roles of DoD, the White House, and SpaceX in controlling and modifying the service. If DoD cannot say plainly who has the authority to degrade a military communications network, our partners cannot rely on it, and our adversaries will look for ways to exploit that uncertainty.

Satellite communications are no longer simply a support function. They now guide drones, communicate targeting data, coordinate logistics, and connect commanders and forces in the field.¹³ DoD and the Intelligence Community have awarded SpaceX billions of dollars for national security capabilities, including Starlink and Starshield services, dedicated military satellite systems, and a classified reconnaissance constellation for the National Reconnaissance Office.¹⁴

The events in Ukraine show how a single point of control can be turned against the forces that depend on it. A decision to degrade service, applied quickly and without notice, has disabled missions across an entire military theater. Whether that change was directed by the White House, DoD, or SpaceX, the episode raises urgent questions about who possesses the technical and legal authority to alter these capabilities, what safeguards govern that authority, and whether DoD has sufficient alternatives if SpaceX-provided services become unavailable.

Congress has a responsibility to ensure that capabilities paid for by the American people are governed by clear, lawful, and accountable processes, and that DoD is not dependent on any single company for communications that our armed forces need to fight and survive.

¹¹ Joe Barnes, *Musk Approached Trump to Slow Down Starlink in Ukraine*, THE TELEGRAPH (London) (Oct. 16, 2026), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2026/10/16/musk-approached-trump-slow-down-starlink-help-ukraine/>.

¹² Alexander Ward, Natalie Andrews & Josh Dawsey, *Musk Ordered Starlink Slowdown That Blindsided Ukraine*, WALL ST. J. (Oct. 21, 2026), <https://www.wsj.com/world/ukraine-starlink-elon-musk-trump-dbc49193>.

¹³ See Ryan McGovern, *Adapting to Multi-Domain Battlefield: Developing Emissions Control SOP*, U.S. ARMY (Apr. 22, 2025), https://www.army.mil/article/284546/adapting_to_multi_domain_battlefield_developing_emissions_control_sop.

¹⁴ See e.g., Ryan Mac, *What Is Starshield, SpaceX's Military-Grade Satellite Internet Service?*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 14, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/14/business/starshield-spacex-ukraine-starlink-satellites-musk.html>; Joey Roulette & Marisa Taylor, *Musk's SpaceX Is Building Spy Satellite Network for US Intelligence Agency, Sources Say*, REUTERS (Mar. 16, 2024), <https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/musks-spacex-is-building-spy-satellite-network-us-intelligence-agency-sources-2024-03-16/>.

To assist the Subcommittee's understanding of these events and DoD's relationship with SpaceX, please provide written answers to the following questions by November 5, 2026.

1. Please describe any Starshield or Starlink capabilities or access points that were restricted for Ukrainian assets in October 2026, including the date the restriction went into place and the duration of that restriction.
2. For each restriction identified in response to Question 1, please identify all personnel involved in or notified of the decision to restrict Starshield services, including, for example, the reported restriction affecting devices traveling faster than 100 mph. In the event that DoD was not directly involved in the decision, please detail when and how DoD was notified of that decision and how the directive to restrict capabilities was communicated to DoD.
3. For each restriction listed in response to Question 1, please describe the process for implementing the restriction, whether officials at DoD carried out the implementation, who those officials were, and, to the extent that SpaceX personnel were involved in the implementation, please describe their roles and list their names and titles.
4. Was Ukraine notified in advance of any changes to their ability to access Starshield? If not, why not? What protocols govern notice to partners before their access to U.S.-provided Starshield capabilities is changed?
5. Under DoD's contracts and agreements with SpaceX, who holds the authority to activate, restrict, geofence, or shut off Starshield service, and under what conditions?
6. Can SpaceX technically alter, geofence or degrade Starshield service for U.S. or partner forces, without DoD authorization? What safeguards prevent SpaceX from doing so?
7. What is the legal and contractual basis for Ukraine's use of Starshield, and who has authority to modify or revoke that access?
8. Provide the total value of all DoD contracts, task orders, and other transactions with SpaceX for Starlink and Starshield services, terminals, and dedicated satellites since fiscal year 2020, by component and fiscal year. Provide all contract numbers, and indicate which awards were made on a sole-source basis and what justification was provided for that decision.
9. Which U.S. military missions, units, and systems currently depend on Starlink or Starshield? Please indicate the missions or units for which no alternative provider is available.
10. Please describe the extent to which Starshield is independent of the commercial Starlink network. Have outages or disruptions affected both at the same time, and what were the effects on U.S. or partner operations?
11. Has DoD assessed the risks of dependence on SpaceX for satellite communications, including risks of service denial, coercion, cyber compromise, or vendor unwillingness? Provide any such assessments.

12. What steps is DoD taking to develop alternative providers, government-owned capacity, or multi-vendor architectures to replace or supplement reliance on Starlink services?
13. Does DoD plan to implement any changes to Starshield that will impact U.S. ally access to services or to SpaceX's authority to throttle, restrict, or otherwise limit access to Starshield?

Please also produce the following Records¹⁵ and communications, for the period from January 1, 2026, to the present unless otherwise noted:

1. All Records documenting, approving, or otherwise referring to the restriction of Ukraine's access to Starlink or Starshield.
2. All communications, including emails, attachments, transmitted documents, text and messaging-app messages, memoranda, and notes of meetings or calls, between DoD and the Executive Office of the President, including the National Security Council, referring or related to any restriction or limitation of Ukraine's access to Starshield or Starlink.
3. All communications, including emails, attachments, transmitted documents, text and messaging-app messages, memoranda, and notes of meetings or calls between DoD and SpaceX referring or related to any restriction or limitation of Ukraine's access to Starshield or Starlink in September or October of 2026.
4. All communications between DoD and the Government of Ukraine concerning any restrictions placed on their access to Starshield.
5. All contracts, task orders, transaction agreements, and modifications between DoD and SpaceX for Starlink or Starshield services, terminals, or satellites since fiscal year 2020 including any provisions on control, access, or service termination, and any sole-source justifications.
6. All risk assessments, studies, or analyses since fiscal year 2022 concerning the DoD's dependence on SpaceX for satellite communications, or the development of alternative providers.

Classified material may be segregated and provided separately through appropriate channels. In addition, I request that DoD officials with direct knowledge of the Starshield restriction and of DoD's satellite communications acquisition strategy brief the Subcommittee on this incident no later than November 12, 2026.

¹⁵ "Records" include any written, recorded, or graphic material of any kind, including letters, memoranda, reports, notes, electronic data (text messages, WhatsApp or Signal messages, emails, email attachments, and any other electronically-created or stored information), calendar entries, inter-office communications, meeting minutes, phone/voice mail or recordings/records of verbal communications, and drafts (whether or not they resulted in final documents).

Secretary Hegseth
October 22, 2026
Page 6

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Blumenthal" clearly legible.

Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations