

# Elon Musk ordered Starlink to be turned off during Ukraine offensive, book says

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Elon Musk ordered his Starlink satellite communications network to be turned off near the Crimean coast last year to hobble a Ukrainian drone attack on Russian warships, according to a new biography. CNN quoted an excerpt from the biography *Elon Musk* by Walter Isaacson, which described how armed submarine drones were approaching their targets when they “lost connectivity and washed ashore harmlessly”. The biography, due out on Tuesday, alleges Musk ordered Starlink engineers to turn off service in the area of the attack because of his concern that Vladimir Putin would respond with nuclear weapons to a Ukrainian attack on Russian-occupied Crimea. He is reported to have said that Ukraine was “going too far” in threatening to inflict a “strategic defeat” on the Kremlin. Musk’s threats to withdraw Starlink communications at various stages of the conflict have been previously reported, but this is the first time it has been alleged he cut off Ukrainian forces in the middle of a specific operation. The date of the would-be attack was not specified. Musk reportedly referred to it as a “mini Pearl Harbor”, although Ukrainian forces were operating within their internationally recognised territorial waters. Musk, the CEO of the Tesla electric car company and SpaceX rocket and spacecraft manufacturer, as well as owner of X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, initially agreed to supply Starlink hardware to Ukraine after Russia’s full-scale invasion disrupted Ukrainian communications. But he reportedly had second thoughts after Kyiv succeeded in repelling the initial Russian assault and began to counterattack. “How am I in this war?” Musk asked rhetorically in an interview with Isaacson. “Starlink was not meant to be involved in wars. It was so people can watch Netflix and chill and get online for school and do good peaceful things, not drone strikes.” Neither X nor SpaceX replied to requests for comment. At the time of the submarine drone attack, according to the extract reported by CNN, Mykhailo Fedorov, one of Ukraine’s deputy prime ministers, pleaded with Musk to restore Starlink communications. “I just want you – the person who is changing the world through technology – to know this,” Fedorov reportedly told Musk. According to Isaacson’s account, Musk refused, saying Ukraine was “now going too far and inviting strategic defeat”. Musk has in the past echoed Russian talking points on Twitter, suggesting that some parts of eastern Ukraine be handed to Russia to reflect “the will of the people”. A study by the European Commission published last week found that Twitter under Musk’s ownership had played a significant role in disseminating Russian propaganda about the Ukraine war. “Preliminary analysis suggests that the reach and influence of Kremlin-backed accounts has grown further in the first half of 2023, driven in particular by the dismantling of Twitter’s safety standards,” the study said. • This article was amended on 14 September 2023 to add an update to the subheading. As the Guardian reported on 12 September 2023, following the publication of this article, Walter Isaacson retracted the claim in his

biography of Elon Musk that the SpaceX CEO had secretly told engineers to switch off Starlink coverage of the Crimean coast.