Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 14.10.2026 www.osw.waw.pl

Ukraine's problems with US intelligence data and the Starshield system

Andrzej Wilk

President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that Ukraine's partners (implicitly the US) had failed to notify Ukraine of Russian ballistic missile attacks on Kyiv on the evenings of 12 and 13 October. Referring to the second attack, he stressed that Kyiv's TEC-4 thermal power plant had been hit and a residential building damaged. Ukraine's Air Force Command also reported receiving no information from partners about missile launches from Russian territory on the evening of 13 October. On the morning of 14 October, Zelensky revealed that the Trump administration had warned of a possible suspension of intelligence sharing unless Kyiv halted its attacks on Russian refineries.

On the night of 13–14 October, restrictions reportedly affected the operation of Starlink terminals installed on drones travelling at speeds above 160 km/h. According to Ukrainian sources, this disrupted "many important missions". The first to report the issue was Serhii Sternenko, an influential YouTuber and volunteer, while available information indicated that the problems affected two drones operating over Russian territory. On the morning of 14 October, the command of the 7th Air Assault Corps reported that the restrictions had led to the cancellation of some missions in the Huliaipole sector of Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Presidential adviser Serhii "Flash" Beskrestnov stated that SpaceX had introduced restrictions on Starshield, the military version of Starlink. He suggested that these were adversely affecting the operation of interceptor drones used to counter Russian attack drones.

However, the US most likely did not suspend intelligence sharing with Ukraine, and the failure to provide information on the launch of two groups of missiles may have resulted from unrelated factors (including poor weather conditions or the absence of a satellite over the area), as has happened before. Restrictions on the Starshield system's operations have reduced the Ukrainian military's strike capabilities. If these restrictions remain in place, they will adversely affect Ukraine's medium-range strikes and, consequently, its ability to counter Russian military operations.

Commentary

- **There is no confirmation that the US has actually suspended intelligence sharing with Ukraine, and Russian missile launches have repeatedly gone undetected in the past.** On 13 October, Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha denied that intelligence sharing had been suspended, contradicting President Zelensky's statement. However, questions remain

about the effectiveness of the missile launch notification system, particularly for the ground-launched Iskander-M and RM-48U ballistic missiles. Disruptions may result from various factors, including weather conditions. According to some experts, the use of air defence systems to launch ballistic missiles (the S-400 in the case of the RM-48U) makes such launches even more difficult to detect. There have been numerous previous instances in which missile launches went undetected, and no notification was issued. Moreover, at least 40 missiles struck Ukraine on the night of 13–14 October (including 36 targeting Kyiv and the surrounding region), and the Ukrainian side received launch notifications for the vast majority of them. Moreover, such intelligence reports are only one component of Ukraine's air defence system. Its most important element is an extensive radar network that independently detects and tracks missiles in flight, regardless of launch notifications.

- **Contrary to most media reports, the restrictions affected the military Starshield system rather than Starlink.** Paradoxically, this confirmed that Ukraine uses Starshield, something Kyiv had not previously officially disclosed, although the media had reported it. Ukraine most likely gained access to Starshield in late 2024. The tangible results of this access included operations conducted by Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces in the spring and summer of this year against Russian logistics, particularly supply routes to occupied Crimea, and shipping in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Ukraine had sought to expand its access to Starshield, primarily to increase the effectiveness of its strikes against targets in Russia. In its official communications, Kyiv disguised these requests as calls to open up the Starlink system, which were technically unjustified (Starlink is fully available to users worldwide). The use of Starshield is subject to restrictions stemming from US security requirements (Washington has so far authorised its use outside Ukraine only by the United Kingdom and New Zealand).
- **The restrictions on the use of the Starshield system have reduced the intensity of Ukrainian medium-range strike operations and, to some extent, complicated the defenders' logistics.** Initially, it seemed reasonable to assume that the restrictions affected only attacks on Russian territory and that the two drones may have lost their connection because they had moved beyond the agreed scope of access to Starshield. This possibility still cannot be ruled out, particularly as the restrictions were introduced abruptly in the middle of the night, with Ukrainian troops on the front line stressing that they had received no prior warning. However, reports from the 7th Air Assault Corps confirmed that the restrictions had affected all Ukrainian offensive drone operations.
- **If the restrictions on access to Starshield remain in place, they will adversely affect Ukraine's medium-range strikes,** one of whose main objectives is to disrupt Russian logistics. However, claims that the move has reduced Ukraine's ability to counter Russian attack drones are overstated. The restrictions were reported in the frontline area, where Russia does not deploy Shahed drones. Moreover, most interceptor drones operate using the Starlink system.