

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Mawadda Iskandar

04.10.2024

Starlink in Yemen: a Trojan horse for espionage?

The unusual announcement that Starlink will offer its first West Asian satellite connectivity services in Yemen, of all places, has sparked a furor in Sanaa, with concerns that the project aims to infiltrate Yemen's national security apparatus to reverse US-Israeli losses in the region's waterways.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

There is much concern that Elon Musk's Starlink intends to provide satellite internet coverage to the United States following the [failure](#) of its Red Sea "Operation Prosperity Guardian" alliance to curb Yemen's pro-Palestinian front.

This conversation has gained traction since the company's [announcement](#) on 18 September that it would launch services in Yemen after months of informal contracts with the Saudi-backed government in Aden. The timing of this announcement raised eyebrows, especially as it coincided with Israel's terrorist attacks in Lebanon involving [exploding pagers](#) and walkie-talkies.

A US-backed initiative

Starlink is a [satellite-based infrastructure](#) developed by SpaceX, the subsidiary of billionaire Elon Musk – who is also a close friend of former US president Donald Trump. It is designed to provide high-speed internet access, particularly in remote areas like conflict zones, by deploying a network of thousands of satellites in low-Earth orbit.

The announcement that [Yemen](#) would be the first country in West Asia to have full access to its services surprised many – particularly because the US embassy in Yemen was quick to [praise](#) the move as an “achievement” that could unlock new opportunities.

The Ministry of Communications in the Aden government said that “the launch of the Starlink service came within the framework of efforts to face the challenges resulting from the conflict,” while Abdul Rahman al-Mahrami, the pro-UAE vice president of the Presidential Leadership Council, emphasized that Starlink would offer secure connections in the face of the ongoing conflict.

It is worth noting that the UAE had already provided Starlink services to its [field hospitals in Gaza](#), even though Elon Musk had previously refused to offer them to the besieged enclave carpet-bombed by Israel for the past year.

Sanaa’s skepticism

The rival Sanaa government, under which most of Yemen’s population lives, was quick to warn that the Starlink project may pose a threat to Yemen and its national security. Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a member of Ansarallah’s political bureau, criticized the US embassy’s stance, which he says:

Confirms the relationship between the launch of Starlink and the war launched by America on Yemen, which threatens to expand the conflict to the orbits of outer space for the first time in history.

An official in Sanaa’s Ministry of Communications also [stated](#):

This behavior clearly confirms the disdain of the mercenaries for the sovereignty and independence of Yemen and their willingness to harm the security and stability of the country in favor of foreign powers, so it was not surprising that the decision was welcomed by the Americans.

In March, the [Financial Times](#) reported that the US and UK faced intelligence shortfalls in their Red Sea campaign, particularly regarding the capabilities of the Ansarallah-aligned forces’ arsenal. This intelligence gap underlined the west’s need for a reliable spy network, and Starlink’s role in this context raises serious questions.

A [Reuters](#) report revealed that SpaceX had signed secret contracts with the US Department of Defense to develop a spy satellite system capable of detecting global threats in real time.

Major General Khaled Ghorab, a Yemeni expert in military affairs, tells *The Cradle* that the timing of this move is linked to US losses resulting from Yemen's naval operations in the Red Sea. He believes the deployment of satellite communications is part of a broader strategy for a new kind of warfare that blends on-the-ground actions with satellite-based intelligence. Against the backdrop of the recent pager explosions in Lebanon, Ghorab highlights the security risks inherent in this project, including the violation of Yemen's sovereignty and the potential for Starlink's use in supporting US and coalition military operations.

Israeli involvement

Another concerning aspect is the involvement of Israel. Israel's [spy satellites](#), OFEK-13 and OFEK-14, are reportedly linked to Starlink's satellite network. SpaceX, as a third party, may provide critical guidance and intelligence to these satellites, further enhancing Tel Aviv's surveillance capabilities in the region. This connection between Starlink and Israeli intelligence efforts has heightened fears in Yemen that the satellite network will be used to undermine the country's security and sovereignty.

Currently, Starlink services are available primarily in Yemeni areas controlled by the Saudi and UAE-led coalition, although roaming packages allow temporary access in other regions. This has prompted concerns about data security, privacy, and the spread of misinformation, as unrestricted satellite internet bypasses local government control.

One of the most pressing issues is the potential for the leakage of sensitive security information to foreign intelligence agencies, which could compromise Yemen's national defense and security efforts. Additionally, there is a looming threat to individual privacy, as the network might be used to eavesdrop on personal communications without any form of local oversight. This could lead to breaches of private data on a large scale.

Moreover, [cybersecurity risks](#) are particularly troubling, as the network might be exploited for dangerous purposes, including facilitating terrorist activities like bombings. The presence of a global satellite internet service that bypasses local regulations raises concerns about its potential to disrupt local internet infrastructure.

A technological leap or a Trojan horse?

Starlink could also introduce unfair competition to local provider Yemen Net, further marginalizing the national telecom provider and hindering local development efforts.

At a societal level, unrestricted internet access carries the risk of exposing users to inappropriate content, spreading misinformation, and circumventing government censorship

mechanisms. This poses a threat to social security, as it could facilitate the dissemination of harmful or destabilizing information.

So the risks of Starlink's entry into Yemen are far-reaching, impacting not only security but also in also broader social, political, and economic dynamics.

Dr Youssef al-Hadri, a right-wing political affairs researcher, shared his views with *The Cradle* on the recent events in Lebanon and the ongoing electronic warfare involving the US and its allies. According to Hadri, intelligence agencies operating in areas under the control of the Sanaa government face challenges in detecting the locations of missiles, drones, and military manufacturing sites.

This shortfall became even more apparent after a major intelligence operation exposed a [long-running spy cell in Yemen](#), with activities spanning across multiple sectors.

From the risk of espionage to the undermining of local telecom providers, the implications of Starlink's operations extend far beyond providing internet access – they could become a vehicle for foreign influence and control.

The first step in confronting and countering this conspiracy is to initiate a comprehensive media and government campaign aimed at raising awareness about the dangers posed by Starlink. Then call for the criminalization of any collaboration with the company, equating it to acts of espionage.

In tandem, local telecom provider Yemen Net should prioritize improving service quality and reducing prices, thereby offering citizens a viable alternative and diminishing the appeal of foreign providers like Starlink.

OCT 3, 2024