

Tech

Elon Musk is ‘unofficial president’ of the US, Netanyahu says

Tech billionaire reveals Iran sent him ‘Charles Dickens-level polite’ letter to shut down Starlink

Anthony Cuthbertson • Tuesday 19 September 2023 07:50 EDT •  Comments



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Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sought **Elon Musk's guidance** on the existential threat posed by **artificial intelligence**, hinting that the tech billionaire is more powerful than the US president.

“I said to my wife Sara, ‘this guy really knows what he’s talking about’, I said ‘he’s the Edison of our time,’” Prime Minister Netanyahu said during a discussion with Mr Musk on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Monday.

“You can’t be president of the US last time I checked, but assume you are.”

The tech billionaire, who is currently the world’s richest person, interjected: “Not officially.”

President Netanyahu responded: “Not officially. OK, so you’re the unofficial president.”

The Israeli leader asked Mr Musk how rogue states could be prevented from developing harmful AI systems, with the Tesla and SpaceX chief saying that the vast amounts of computing hardware needed to build and operate it would be detectable from space.

“At the very hardest level, the [AI] that’s least understandable requires massive amounts of power and a large number of computers and the right software and the right data - it’s something you’d notice,” Mr Musk said.

“It’s difficult to hide, sort of similar to uranium, you can sort of detect the uranium radiation.”

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After Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he had spent most of his adult life trying to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, Mr Musk revealed that the government of Iran had sent him an unexpectedly polite request to shut down SpaceX’s [Starlink](#) space internet service.

SpaceX received permission from the US state department to [switch on Starlink for users in Iran](#) last year, despite the economic sanctions, in order to give people unrestricted access to the internet.

“We got an upset letter from the government of Iran, but actually the letter was so polite, I expected it to be angry or something but it was Charles Dickens-level polite,” Mr Musk said.

“I was expecting to see ‘PS. death to America and **Israel**’ or something like that, but they didn’t have that.”

US President Joe Biden is set to meet Prime Minister Netanyahu in New York on Wednesday amid a period of increased tension between Israel and the Biden administration. This has been driven by disagreements over how to deal with Iran, mass protests in Israeli cities against proposed judicial reforms, and comments from Prime Minister Netanyahu’s political allies.

President Biden has expressed concern about the controversial reforms, according to National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, while also questioning Israel’s continued settlement growth in the West Bank.

Despite the tension, both leaders are expected to emphasise the strong relationship between the US and Israel.

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