

Musk tells China data gathered by Teslas remain secret: report

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This file photo from March 9, 2020 shows Tesla boss Elon Musk speaking at an event in Washington; he has denied that his cars could be used to spy on China

Tesla boss Elon Musk strongly denied Saturday that his cars, which gather large amounts of data, could ever be used to spy on China despite

fears raised by Beijing, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The assertion from the head of the electric car maker followed a decision by the Chinese government to bar members of its military or employees of some state-owned companies from using Teslas.

Musk made the comments via video link to a Beijing conference of the government-backed China Development Forum.

Chinese authorities are concerned that data gathered by Tesla vehicles, such as images taken by the cars' cameras, could be transmitted to the US, the Journal said.

Tesla did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

China is a crucially important market for Tesla, which has a factory in Shanghai and is already selling one-fourth of its production in that country. The group hopes to sell 200,000 vehicles in China this year.

In his remarks, Musk insisted that no American or Chinese company would take the risk of collecting private data and sharing it with their government.

"Whether it's Chinese or US, the negative effects if a commercial company did engage in spying—the negative effects for that company would be extremely bad," Musk said.

If Tesla used its automobiles to spy in any country, he said, it would be shut down everywhere, providing "a very strong incentive for us to be very confidential."

Chinese fears that data gathered by groups like Tesla could pose a threat to national security come amid an ongoing US-Chinese confrontation

over technology and commerce.

Last week, American authorities classified the Huawei group and four other Chinese telecommunications equipment makers as threats to US national security, undercutting any hopes that the US, under President Joe Biden, might ease tense bilateral relations.

Huawei had been blacklisted in 2019 by the Trump administration, which accused it without providing evidence of potentially spying for Beijing by using its equipment to monitor communications and data traffic in other countries.

The Trump administration also accused TikTok—the platform for short videos that is a subsidiary of China's ByteDance group—of gathering confidential data to share with Beijing.

Musk, in his comments Saturday, dismissed the American fears about TikTok as "irrational."

That platform, particularly popular among the young, mostly just shows people "doing silly dances," he said.

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