

## Opinions

# Can the Trump-Musk 'bromance' last?

Today 06:00 am JST 2 Comments

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Trump and Musk watched a UFC bout in New York together at the weekend Image: AFP

**WASHINGTON**The world's richest man, Elon Musk, has been an ever-present sidekick for President-elect Donald Trump since the U.S. election at the start of the month.

"I can't get him out of here," Trump joked about Musk at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida last Thursday. "I like having him here as well. He's done a fantastic job, an incredible mind."

But can the bromance between the world's wealthiest man and the soon-to-be US president survive some major policy differences and their own combustible personalities?

AFP looks at six possible areas of friction:

## Who's the boss?

Musk is famed for his manic working habits and self-described "hardcore" style, running his companies as personal fiefdoms in which his authority is rarely challenged.

From factory production lines to the boardroom, he is used to getting his way with an abrasive style that sees him fire people on the spot and sometimes insult their intelligence in public.

Trump, also a tycoon fond of firing and humiliating people publicly, demands total loyalty and has chafed against sharing the limelight with others in the past.

He also likes to play his advisors and cabinet members against each other, former aides say.

Musk reportedly had a first public row with Trump transition official Boris Epshteyn last week, according to the Axios news site.

And he openly endorsed brokerage billionaire Howard Lutnick for U.S. Treasury secretary on Saturday, setting up an early test of his influence.

## Climate change

Musk invested in Tesla in 2004 partly out of concern about global warming.

In 2017, he resigned from Trump's business advisory councils to protest the then-president's decision to pull the United States out of the Paris climate change accord.

"Climate change is real. Leaving Paris is not good for America or the world," Musk wrote on Twitter at the time.

Trump, who has called climate change a "hoax," is widely expected to abandon U.S. commitments again after President Joe Biden re-joined the Paris Accord in 2020.

Musk has shifted his views recently, telling Trump during a live conversation on X in August that "if 50-100 years from now we're mostly sustainable I think that will probably be OK."

The world's top climate scientific body, the U.N.'s IPCC, says average global temperatures are on track to reach 1.5C above pre-industrial times in the early 2030s, a key level with major consequences for ecosystems.

## Energy transition

Musk has bet big on the energy transition, making his fortune from Tesla electric cars, but also developing domestic battery technology and solar-powered roof tiles.

Trump ran pledging to "drill, baby, drill" and is expected to approve new fossil fuel infrastructure and permits, even opening up protected federal land to oil and gas companies.

Musk used to deride the "mine-and-burn hydrocarbon economy" that Trump openly champions.

The president-elect has nominated a fracking magnate as his energy secretary. Chris Wright publicly dismissed climate change and the energy transition last year.

## China

Trump's aggressive stance on China and the risk of a trade war between the world's two biggest economies could be another major thorn in the relationship between the billionaires.

China is a major market for Tesla, where the company has one of its so-called "Gigafactories" and is trying to compete with fast-growing home-grown manufacturers.

Musk never says a negative word about the ruling Communist Party, putting him at odds with the China hawks like U.S. Senator Marco Rubio who have been tapped to join Trump's cabinet.

## 'DOGE' on a leash

An unsparing cost-cutter in his own companies, Musk has been tasked by Trump with leading the "Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)," which will take an ax to government spending.

Plans to gut programs will almost certainly, however, face severe political pushback, even from Republicans.

As mid-term elections approach, whether it's rescuing Medicaid checks for the poor or handing out defense contracts to benefactors, Trump's political priorities could waver from Musk's.

## Big Tech

Musk's complicated relationships and personal rivalries with Silicon Valley's biggest tech companies go back decades, and he is expected to face myriad conflicts of interest as part of the administration.

Would Musk, who owns his own AI company, sit by quietly if Trump champions OpenAI, the Microsoft-backed startup that Musk played a key role in starting a decade ago?

If Amazon founder Jeff Bezos gets Trump's ear, would Musk tolerate that a rival to SpaceX got closer to the White House inner sanctum?