

# UK not too small to be centre of AI regulation, says Rishi Sunak

Publication Date: 2023-06-07

Author: Peter Walker

Section: Technology

Tags: Artificial intelligence (AI), Rishi Sunak, Joe Biden, Computing, news

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/07/sunak-hopes-to-bring-biden-on-board-for-ai-safety-summit>



Rishi Sunak has used a trip to Washington to push the UK as a global centre for artificial intelligence regulation, insisting its record in the sector will make others listen to “this mid-sized country”. Downing Street is hopeful that Joe Biden, whom Sunak was to meet at the White House on Thursday, will agree to US involvement in a UK-hosted global summit on AI safety in the autumn. The summit, formally announced by No 10 a day before the talks, is billed as a chance for leading companies and “like-minded countries” to discuss how to limit the potential risks of the technology’s rapid advancement. It is designed to run alongside discussions on AI at last month’s G7 summit in Japan, rather than competing. UK officials say the London gathering would be intended for companies and governments to start discussions over what sort of safeguards might be needed. Sunak’s official spokesperson declined to say which countries might take part, but strongly hinted that Biden might have positive words to say at his joint press conference with the prime minister after their discussions. “On US involvement, I would probably wait for tomorrow to see what comes out of that, but you would expect like-minded countries to be involved,” he said. The summit, the spokesperson said, was “for likeminded countries who share the recognition that AI presents significant opportunities, but realise we need to make sure the right guardrails are in place”. Asked if it was aimed to counter China and Russia, he said: “No, it’s about looking at technology that is developing extremely quickly – perhaps faster than even those involved in its creation expected.” Ahead of the talks, Sunak will present Biden with a personalised Barbour jacket bearing the words “Mr President” and a copy of a book on discipline in the merchant navy written by the president’s Irish great great-grandfather, Christopher Biden, in the mid-19th century. Speaking on Wednesday, Sunak rebuffed the idea that the UK is too minor a player to have such a pivotal role in shaping the future of AI, especially now it is no longer an EU member – and stressed what he sees as his own personal prescience on the subject. “I believe the UK is well-placed to lead and shape the conversation on this because we are very strong when it comes to AI,” he told the BBC in one of a series of broadcast interviews from Washington. “And it’s a topic that I, in particular, started talking about two years ago, to make sure that we are prepared.” Speaking to reporters on the plane to the US, Sunak was bullish when asked if the UK risked being seen as deluded in seeking such a central role. “This mid-size country is the only country other than the US that has brought together the three leading companies with large language models,” the prime minister said. “You would be hard-pressed to find many other countries other than the US in the western world with more expertise and talent in AI. We are the natural place to lead the conversation.” Sunak’s recent push for “guardrails” to limit the potential scope of AI, and for the UK to be a base for this, is arguably a fairly recent shift in approach from a government white paper on AI

published in March, which largely discussed the technology's potential benefits and uses. Since a series of experts warned that the rapid advance of the science could pose a direct and even existential threat to humanity, Sunak has become notably more vocal about the need to ensure proper regulation, and for the UK to lead on this. It remains to be seen whether Sunak will extract anything tangible on AI or other subjects from the US president during a brief trip that, while heavy on hospitality, has few specific policy aims, and is mainly focused on ongoing, multilateral issues such as Ukraine and economic cooperation. Before the meeting, and a joint press conference with the US president, Sunak laid a wreath at the Arlington military cemetery in Washington before holding a round of talks with senior senators and congress members from both parties, and was due to attend a baseball game. Before seeing Biden on Thursday, he was meeting a series of US corporate chief executives at a business roundtable.