

Rise of artificial intelligence is inevitable but should not be feared, 'father of AI' says

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The man once described as the father of artificial intelligence is breaking ranks with many of his contemporaries who are fearful of the AI arms race, saying what is coming is inevitable and we should learn to embrace it. Prof Jürgen Schmidhuber's work on neural networks in the 1990s was developed into language-processing models that went on to be used in technologies such as Google Translate and Apple's Siri. The New York Times in 2016 said when AI matures it might call Schmidhuber "Dad". That maturity has arrived, and while some AI pioneers are looking upon their creations in horror – calling for a handbrake on the acceleration and proliferation of the technology – Schmidhuber says those calls are misguided. The German computer scientist says there is competition between governments, universities and companies all seeking to advance the technology, meaning there is now an AI arms race, whether humanity likes it or not. Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup "You cannot stop it," says Schmidhuber, who is now the director of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology's AI initiative in Saudi Arabia. "Surely not on an international level, because one country might have really different goals from another country. So, of course, they are not going to participate in some sort of moratorium. "But then I think you also shouldn't stop it. Because in 95% of all cases, AI research is really about our old motto, which is make human lives longer and healthier and easier." Schmidhuber's position contrasts with a number of his contemporaries, including Dr Geoffrey Hinton, who spectacularly quit Google this week after a decade with the company in order to speak more freely on AI. Hinton, who is referred to as the godfather of AI, won the Turing award in 2018 for his work on "deep learning", which is the foundation for much of the AI in use today. He said companies like Google had stopped being proper stewards for AI in the face of competition to advance the technology. He believes if AI becomes more intelligent than humans, it could be exploited by bad actors, including authoritarian leaders. But Schmidhuber, who has had a long-running dispute with Hinton and others in his industry over appropriate credit for AI research, says much of these fears are misplaced. He says the best counter to bad actors using AI will be developing good tools with AI. "It's just that the same tools that are now being used to improve lives can be used by bad actors, but they can also be used against the bad actors," he says. "And I would be much more worried about the old dangers of nuclear bombs than about the new little dangers of AI that we see now." Schmidhuber believes AI will advance to the point where it surpasses human intelligence and has no interest in humans – while humans will continue to benefit and use the tools developed by AI. This is a theme Schmidhuber has discussed for years, and was once accused at a conference of "destroying the scientific method" with his assertions. As the Guardian has reported previously, Schmidhuber's position as AI's father is

not undisputed, and he can be a controversial figure within the AI community. Some have said his optimism about the rate of technological progress was unfounded and possibly dangerous. In addition to Hinton, others more recently have called for AI development to slow down. Billionaire Elon Musk was one of thousands to sign a letter published in late March by the Future of Life Institute calling for a six-month moratorium on the creation of AIs more powerful than GPT-4, the machine behind ChatGPT. Musk revealed he had fallen out with Google co-founder Larry Page last month because he said Page was not taking AI safety seriously enough and was seeking to create a “digital god”.