

Concerns mount over Musk sick taste for revenge

by [Miranda Nazzaro](#)

Elon Musk's growing criticism of President-elect Trump's opponents and industry competitors is raising concerns he may use his increasing influence to intimidate adversaries.

These fears are compounded by Trump's repeated vows for revenge against his perceived enemies, with experts warning Musk could echo and carry out the same rhetoric on his social media platform, X, in the coming months.

"Musk is a good fit for Trump, because Musk clearly enjoys ... vengeance and gets off on retribution," said Matt Dallek, a political historian and professor at George Washington University.

"This is partly, at least, what animates him, maybe even more so at this point than his business enterprises."

Neither X nor a spokesperson for the Trump transition team responded to The Hill's request for comment.

Concerns were amplified last week after Musk went after retired Army Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who became an outspoken critic of President-elect Trump after testifying in his first impeachment trial.

“Vindman is on the payroll of Ukrainian oligarchs and has committed treason against the United States,” Musk wrote on X, responding to comments Vindman made in an interview about Musk’s reported conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Musk said Vindman, who served as the top Ukraine expert on the National Security Council under Trump, “will pay the appropriate penalty,” to which Vindman responded, “You, Elon, appear to believe you can act with impunity and are attempting to silence your critics. I’m not intimidated.”

Some Democrats rallied in defense of the combat veteran, including Vindman’s twin brother — Rep.-elect Eugene Vindman (D-Va.), who called Musk’s comments “really false and defamatory.”

In another message to Musk, Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) said the “Vindman family embodies patriotism and public service. You know nothing about either.”

While Trump has remained mostly mum about Alexander Vindman in recent years, Musk appears to be using his immense platform, where he has more than 206 million followers, to reignite the retaliatory tone.

“It’s hard to think of anyone else who has been at least in the past year or six months, more high profile, more influential in terms of their public support of Trump,” Dallek said.

“Musk, the richest person in the world, has put much of his sources and his bully pulpit behind Trump.”

“What does he [Musk] do with that massive platform? Well, he names government officials who he says he wants to fire,” he added.

Alexander Vindman was ultimately removed from the National Security Council in 2020, two days after the Senate acquitted Trump, who called him a “Never Trumper” in 2019.

The Pentagon’s Office of Inspector General later found Eugene Vindman likely faced retaliation from the then-president’s officials for his role in the impeachment.

Alexander Vindman is not the first political figure to be called out by Musk and other Trump allies.

Last month, Musk wrote special counsel Jack Smith’s “abuse of the justice system cannot go unpunished,” mirroring threats from Trump and some Republican lawmakers to retaliate for what they believe were politically motivated cases.

Smith spearheaded the Justice Department’s election interference case and classified documents case against Trump, both of which he moved to dismiss following the president-elect’s victory last month.

And shortly before the election, Musk told advisers that his political action committee, America PAC, should challenge “Soros DAs,” in reference to

progressive district attorneys backed by liberal mega-donor George Soros, The Washington Post reported.

In a repost of an X user listing “six Soros-backed District Attorneys facing reelection” in 2025 or 2026, Musk wrote “interesting” and tagged America PAC’s account. This included Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg (D), who criminally prosecuted the president-elect in a hush money case earlier this year.

Musk has also singled out on social media federal employees who are well outside the political fray.

Last month, Musk reposted a user who zeroed in on a little-known director of climate diversification at the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation and posted her name and salary.

Musk’s repost, writing “So many fake jobs,” has more than 33 million views, and the named woman apparently shut down her social media accounts, CNN reported.

He also singled out a senior adviser to climate at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in another repost that listed her name and title.

“He has a huge platform, and anytime you do — we’ve seen what type of bluster and misinformation and just spiteful, hateful rhetoric has had on, not just our elections, but on our society as whole,” Democratic strategist Kristen Hawn told The Hill.

“The impact that his words have in general, given his platform, and also given his influence within the White House,” is “certainly” enough to have ramifications, Hawn added.

“Even by making a threat, even by the very act of intimidating someone like Vindman or these government officials already does a lot of damage,” Dallek added. “It already has a big impact, because those people then become targeted. They become targeted by Musk’s followers, by Trump’s, the MAGA [Make America Great Again] movement.”

The impact of retaliatory rhetoric by Trump and his allies has already been seen with some of his critics, including former Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), who said she received death threats after she broke with House Republicans and backed Trump’s impeachment.

Like Trump, Musk has crossed ways with some of his competitors in the tech and space world when it comes to his own endeavors.

His oft-public spats with competitors, along with his new government advisory role with Trump’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) panel, has some concerned he could wield his influence to unfairly suppress competition.

Musk is “not some altruistic person here,” Hawn said of the millions he poured into the election. “He clearly sees the benefit of being this close, spending all this time at Mar-a-Lago.”

“And being this close to the president-elect and having the responsibilities given to him by the president that could potentially impact not just government spending, but the workforce,” she continued. “That is concerning, because he has his own objectives.”

Leading the DOGE panel, Musk will be responsible for making recommendations to reduce government spending and regulations in various sectors, including the agencies that have federal contracts with his companies SpaceX and Tesla, along with other leading tech agencies.

Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, told The Wall Street Journal he has fears over Musk’s new ties to Trump.

“It just makes me nervous in general, the way I have seen Trump make decisions ... and certainly Musk as well,” he told the Journal. “Musk clearly has influence now.”

Musk has taken particular issue with ChatGPT maker OpenAI and its CEO, Sam Altman, whom he accused of manipulating him into supporting the artificial intelligence (AI) endeavor by convincing him it would develop safe and transparent AI.

He has an ongoing lawsuit against OpenAI for allegedly abandoning its founding principles as a nonprofit to become a for-profit company.

Altman said Wednesday he was “tremendously sad” over his tension with Musk and pushed back against suggestions the billionaire will use his allyship with Trump to harm OpenAI.

“I believe pretty strongly that Elon will do the right thing and that it would be profoundly un-American to use political power to the degree that Elon would hurt competitors and advantage his own businesses,” he told the New York Times DealBook conference.

Musk also repeatedly clashes with Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon and aerospace company Blue Origin, a direct competitor of SpaceX.

The two went back and forth last month after Musk claimed Bezos told others to sell their Tesla and SpaceX stock under the presumption Trump would lose the election. Bezos denied the claim.

Meanwhile, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg dined with Trump last week at his Mar-a-Lago resort in what was seen by many as an attempt to court the president-elect ahead of his second term.

Trump seemingly changed his view on the Facebook founder after he chose to withhold an endorsement during this year’s presidential election.

For his part, Musk famously challenged Zuckerberg to a cage match last summer and shared social media jokes mocking billionaire Mark Cuban, who backed Vice President Harris in the presidential race.

Before DOGE, Ramaswamy spent years attacking Musk for ties to China



By [Andrew Kaczynski](#),

Vivek Ramaswamy, the co-chair of the proposed [Department of Government Efficiency](#) alongside billionaire Elon Musk, has a lengthy history of attacking his partner's ties to China, frequently referring to Musk as a "circus monkey" and a puppet for the Chinese Communist Party.

Ramaswamy's critiques, reviewed by CNN's KFile, include pointed remarks about Musk's 2022 suggestion [that Taiwan should become](#) a special administrative region of China, a stance aligned with Beijing's interests and one that drew praise from Chinese officials.

Tesla's investments in the Chinese market and Musk's comment on Taiwan have drawn fierce criticism from Ramaswamy, who argued the Tesla CEO was pandering to the Chinese Communist Party for business benefits, such as regulatory approvals and tax breaks.

"I think Tesla is increasingly beholden to China," Ramaswamy [said in May 2023](#) when discussing the carmaker's decision to build a [battery plant](#) in Shanghai.

[Related article Musk and Ramaswamy suggest ending time changes, reviving an effort that has failed in the past](#)

"I have no reason to think Elon won't jump like a circus monkey when Xi Jinping calls in the hour of need," Ramaswamy added, referring to the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and president of China.

Tesla is deeply reliant on China, [with deliveries from](#) its Shanghai facility accounting for more than half its global sales in 2023.

In their collaboration within the Department of Governmental Efficiency, or DOGE, Musk and Ramaswamy [share a goal](#) of cutting federal regulations and reducing the federal workforce. But Musk's role as the leader of companies with lucrative government contracts has sparked concerns about his potential conflicts of interest.

Ramaswamy's own words could be used by critics to question Musk's role as a government cost-cutter, given how much his own companies have benefited over the years from billions of dollars in government contracts and assistance.

Vivek Ramaswamy speaks at the Republican National Convention on July 16, 2024, in Milwaukee.

“Both Tesla and SpaceX quite likely would not exist as successful businesses if it were not for the use of public funding, either through subsidies, through the electric car industry, or through actual government contracting in the case of SpaceX,” Ramaswamy [said in 2022 on a Fox News podcast](#).

Though Musk, the world’s richest man, and Ramaswamy, himself a millionaire, are both seen as friends of Big Tech, the two have divergent views when it comes to China. While Musk has recently favored closer ties, Ramaswamy has called for an economic decoupling from China.

As a presidential candidate in the 2024 GOP primary, Ramaswamy was often critical of US economic ties to China. While he claimed other companies such as Apple and Black Rock were enabling and making political concessions to China, he often singled out Musk for some of his harshest criticism.

“Elon Musk has, I think, demonstrated his willingness to change his political tunes based on the favors that he gets to be able to do business in China,” Ramaswamy added on the 2022 Fox News podcast.

Examining potential for DOGE partnership

CNN’s KFile reviewed Ramaswamy’s comments on Musk when looking into how the two might operate DOGE, the nongovernmental entity. Trump proposed creating a government efficiency commission as part of his economic plans unveiled in September, claiming it could save trillions by eliminating fraud and improper payments within six months.

[kfileHegseth has a history of supporting controversial policies involving the military](#)

Trump’s statement last month [announcing the creation](#) of DOGE quoted Musk as saying that “this will send shockwaves through the system, and anyone involved in Government waste, which is a lot of people!” Ramaswamy separately [responded on X](#) with a slogan he often used during his presidential campaign to call for the elimination of federal agencies, writing: “SHUT IT DOWN.”

But Ramaswamy’s sharp critiques of Musk’s ties to China, all made within the last two years, have received little attention. Given how persistently he criticized Musk, the comments raise questions over how the two intend to work together.

Musk, through a spokesperson, declined to comment.

Ramaswamy said his past attacks on Musk came before they had ever met.

“We aired some of these issues the first time we spoke,” he said in a statement. Along with crediting Musk for taking “extraordinary risks against his financial interests,” Ramaswamy told CNN the two know each other well now. “I love him and respect the hell out of him, and I’m proud to call him a friend. The only country he puts first is the same one I do: the United States of America.”

Elon Musk attends the America First Policy Institute Gala held at Mar-a-Lago on November 14, 2024, in Palm Beach, Florida.

A lengthy history of attacks on Musk

On a number of occasions, Ramaswamy pointed to Musk's Taiwan comments as an example of tailoring his political positions to appease the Chinese government, drawing a direct connection between Musk's comments and Tesla's business benefits.

"He got a nice 'attaboy' on the back, a little pat on the back when his Shanghai factory and regulator in China gave him a nice little tax break within days after him having made that comment about Taiwan," Ramaswamy [said in another interview in 2022](#).

Musk [reportedly](#) told Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang in May 2023 that Tesla was against the notion of decoupling, instead referring to the interests of the US and China as "intertwined like conjoined twins."

Ramaswamy criticized Musk's comment in multiple posts on X.

In one lengthy post targeting Musk in May 2023 [he wrote](#), "the U.S. needs leaders who aren't in China's pocket."

"Now the crusader for 'free speech' (@elonmusk) kisses the ring of the world's biggest censor: Xi Jinping," he wrote in [another June 2023](#) tweet.

[Related article Musk and Ramaswamy think they have new power to cut federal regulations. Here's why it's not so simple](#)

Ramaswamy echoed those comments multiple times in 2023 and 2022.

"I do think it is a kinship that Tim Cook and Elon Musk probably have, is that they both bend the knee to the true overlord, which is Xi Jinping," said Ramaswamy [in 2022](#), mentioning Cook, Apple's CEO.

"This is what China's recognized, is that US companies will jump; if Xi Jinping says 'jump,' they'll say, 'How high?'" he said in another comment mentioning Musk [in June 2023 on Fox News](#).

In a July 2023 interview, Ramaswamy also labeled US companies' dependence on China a "great threat" to the US and argued Musk's push to advance electric vehicle manufacturing has made America less competitive on fossil fuel production.

"And by the way, all this is for an electric vehicle movement that is about actually – in part – subsidizing a form of behavior in the United States that leaves the US less competitive when it comes to fossil fuel production, as well as fossil fuel utilization. And by the way, constraints that don't apply in China in the same way," he said in [May 2023 on his podcast](#).

Despite recent subsidies to lower the cost of electric vehicles, the US remains the world leader in fossil fuel production, [pumping a record](#) 13.4 million barrels of crude oil a day this year.