

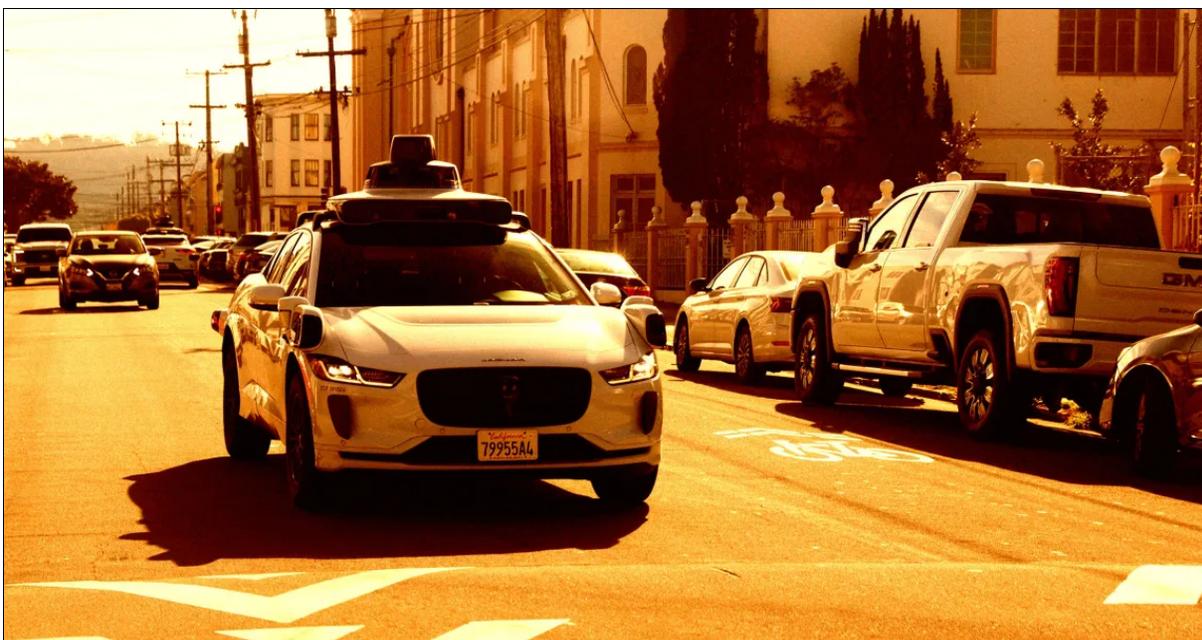
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It Turns Out That When Waymos Are Stumped, They Get Intervention From Workers in the Philippines

"They provide guidance."



By **[Victor Tangermann](#)** / Published **Feb 6, 2026 10:12 AM EST**



Bronté Wittpenny/San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images

Waymo has established itself as the autonomous ride-hailing service to beat, operating a fleet of several thousand self-driving taxis across the United States, with active services in ten major metropolitan areas.

That “self-driving” may be due for some extra scrutiny, though. During a Congressional hearing on Wednesday, Waymo’s chief

safety officer, Mauricio Peña, was grilled over the company's use of Chinese-made vehicles and reliance on overseas workers, as [Business Insider reports](#).

The stakes and public safety implications are considerable. The news comes roughly a week after a Waymo robotaxi struck and injured a child near a Santa Monica, California, elementary school, [triggering a federal probe](#).

After being pressed for a breakdown on where these overseas operators operate, Peña said he didn't have those stats, explaining that some operators live in the US, but others live much further away, including in the Philippines.

"They provide guidance," he argued. "They do not remotely drive the vehicles. Waymo asks for guidance in certain situations and gets an input, but the Waymo vehicle is always in charge of the dynamic driving tasks, so that is just one additional input."

The admission didn't sit well with senator Ed Markey (D-MA), who argued that "having people overseas influencing American vehicles is a safety issue."

"The information the operators receive could be out of date. It could introduce tremendous cybersecurity vulnerabilities," he argued. "We don't know if these people have US driver's licenses."

"It's one thing when a taxi is replaced by an Uber or a Lyft," Markey concluded. "It's another thing when the jobs just go completely overseas."

In a statement to *Futurism*, a Waymo spokesperson said that its fleet response teams are "located in the US and abroad" and are "required to have a passenger car or van license, and are reviewed for records of traffic violations, infractions, and driving-related convictions."

“Additionally, they are routinely, randomly screened for drug use, and are put through thorough criminal background checks in addition to evaluations of their driving records,” the spokesperson added.

Waymo has been fairly upfront about its human operators. In a [May 2024 blog post](#), the company compared it to a “phone-a-friend.”

“When the Waymo vehicle encounters a particular situation on the road, the autonomous driver can reach out to a human fleet response agent for additional information to contextualize its environment,” the post reads. “The Waymo Driver [software] does not rely solely on the inputs it receives from the fleet response agent and it is in control of the vehicle at all times.”

In case the car’s driving software encounters something atypical, it may choose to send a request to a human fleet response agent, who then can help out by viewing real-time feeds from the vehicle’s exterior cameras.

While that may sound like the remote operator isn’t directly controlling the vehicle’s driving responses, it nonetheless goes to show how autonomous vehicles still rely substantially on human intellect. Fleet response agents may determine what lane a vehicle should pick, or propose a “path for the vehicle to consider,” as the blog post explains.

Put simply, the remote agent may not control the steering wheel, but they still make major decisions on where the vehicle navigates next.

During the same hearing, Tesla’s VP of vehicle engineering Lars Moravy told lawmakers that Tesla’s vehicles also rely on similar remote operators.

“We have many layers of security within our system and, similar to

what Dr. Peña said, our driving controls, go, stop, steer, are in a core embedded central layer that cannot be accessed from outside the vehicle,” he said.

Moravy also argued that to stop anybody from taking control of vehicles, the company “actively participates in hacking events, trying paying people to try to get into our vehicles.”

The executives’ remarks are the latest illustration of how driverless taxis navigating public roads today are still far from being 100 percent autonomous. Tesla, in particular, has been playing it safe, quietly pausing its “unsupervised” robotaxi rides last week, meaning that there currently don’t appear to be any robotaxis with no human “safety monitor” in the driver’s seat.

It’s an especially glaring subject as lawmakers continue to ponder the risks of having autonomous vehicles coexist with human drivers on the road. And given the latest data, those risks remain substantial, with new National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data suggesting Tesla’s robotaxis are crashing three times as much as humans — even with human monitors.

Adding the influence of an entirely separate third party, a remote assistance operator who’s based overseas, could be a recipe for disaster, according to Markey, a glaring safety gap that needs to be filled.

“Overseas remote assistance operations may be more susceptible to physical takeover by hostile actors, potentially granting them driver-like control of thousands of vehicles transporting passengers on American roads,” he said in a statement. “Heavy and fast-moving vehicles could quickly become the weapons of foreign actors seeking to harm innocent Americans.”

Updated with comment from Waymo.

More on Waymo: [Waymo Under Investigation After Crashing Into Child Outside Elementary School](#)



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I'm a senior editor at Futurism, where I edit and write about NASA and the private space sector, as well as topics ranging from SETI and artificial intelligence to tech and medical policy.

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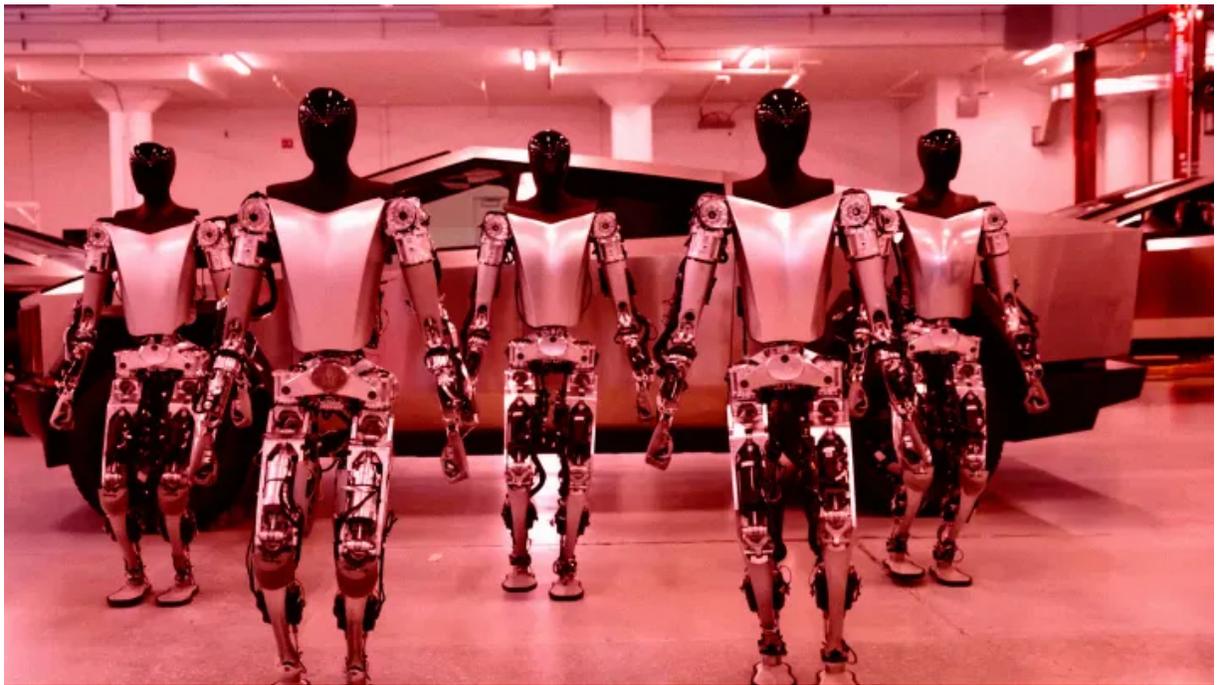
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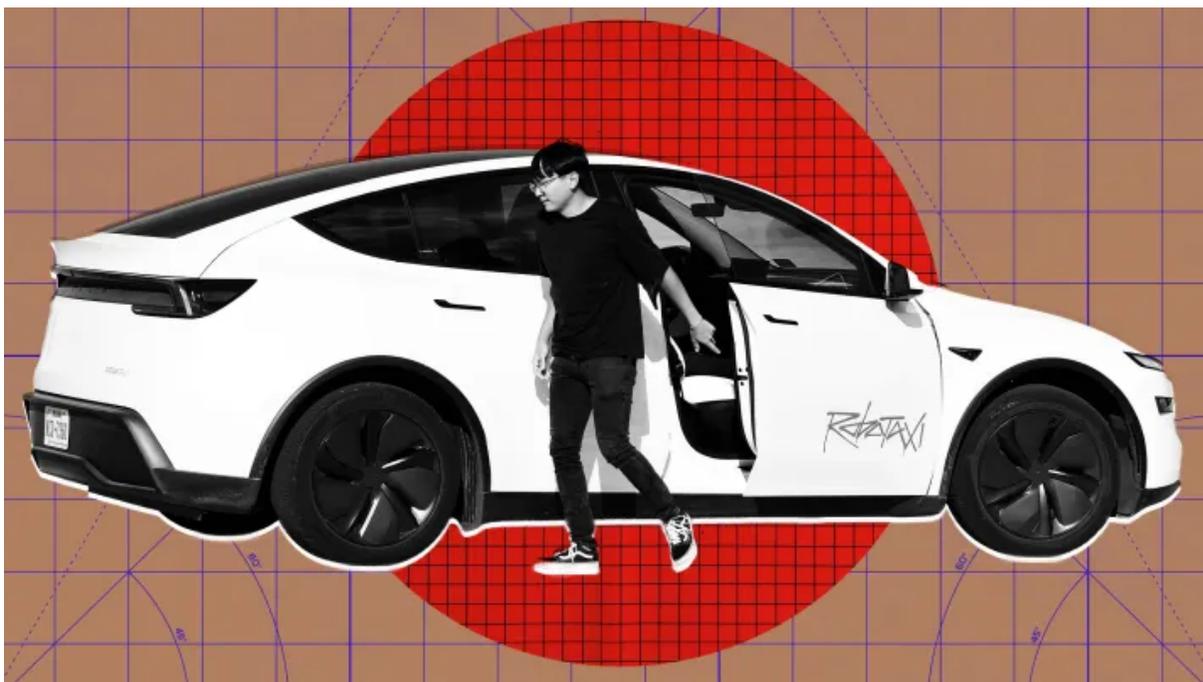
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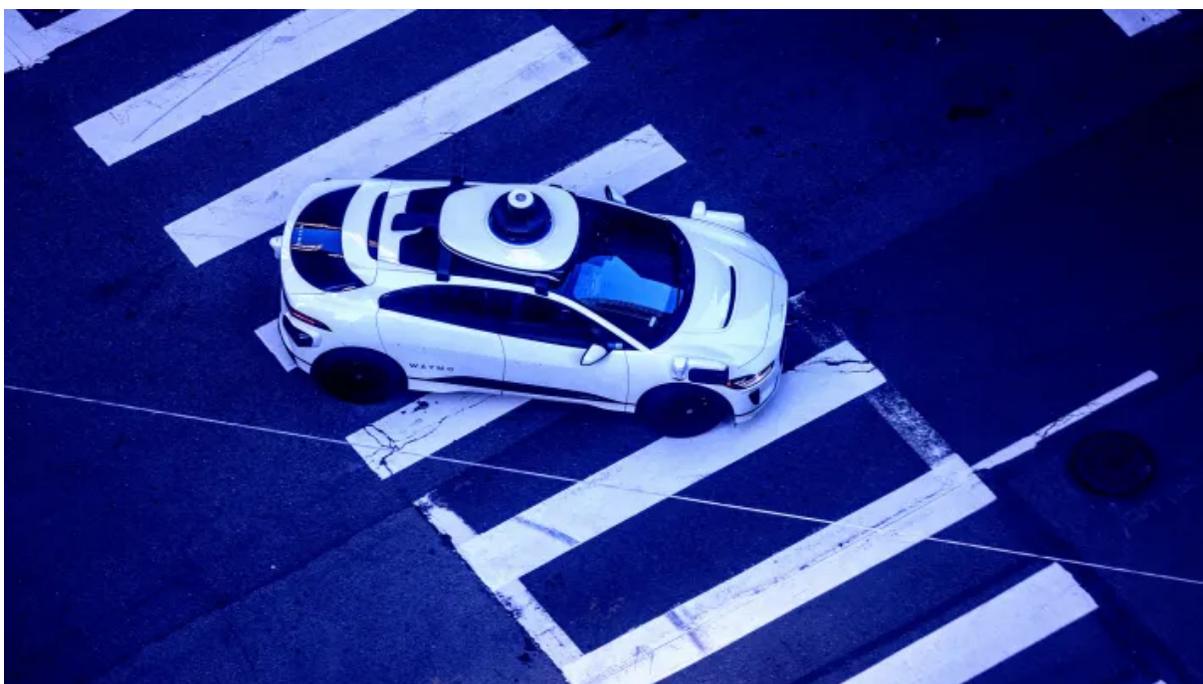
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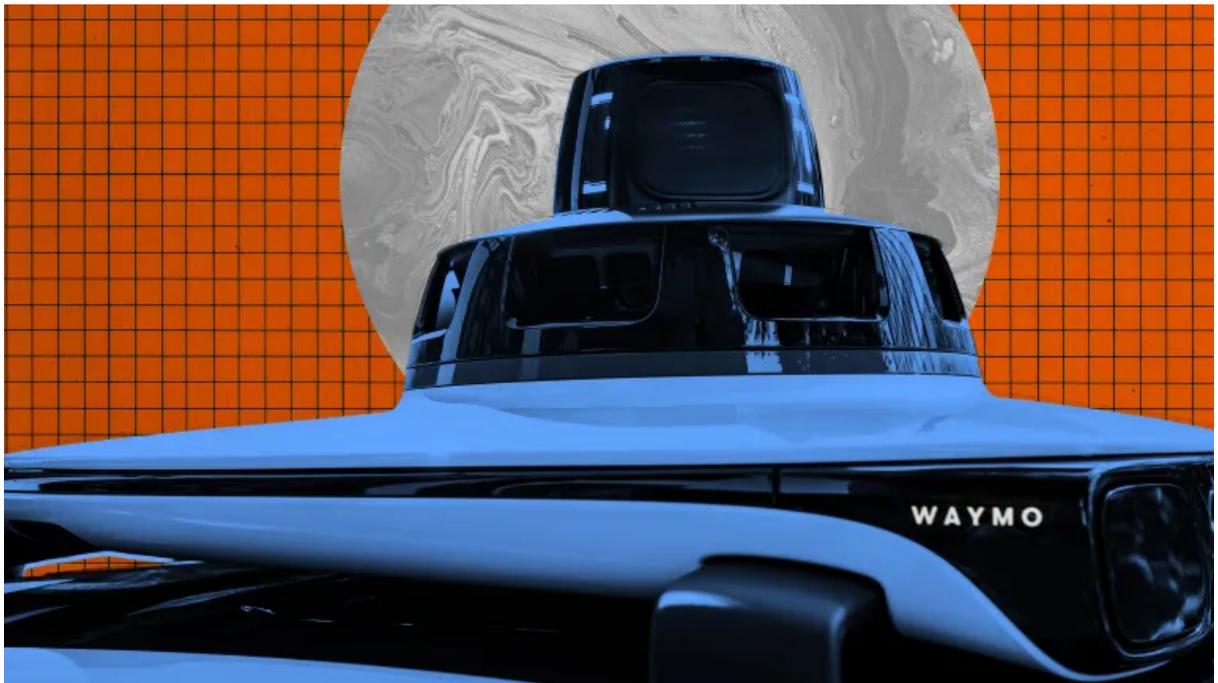
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