

Trump claims victory at tense Nato summit

Section: News Edition: 01

DONALD TRUMP yesterday made clear that he wants Britain and other Nato allies to spend 4per cent of GDP on defence as he claimed victory at a two-day gathering in Brussels.

The US president said he wanted the current 2per cent target to be doubled - bringing a boost to those in Britain lobbying for an increase of billions of pounds to the defence budget. Britain is one of just a handful of the 29 Nato countries that spend more than 2per cent of GDP on defence.

The call came after a morning of high drama and behind-the-scenes battles at the Nato headquarters as Mr Trump pushed hard for spending increases.

The US president reportedly used a session with world leaders to demand that their countries hit the 2 per cent spending target by January 2019.

There were claims that Mr Trump said America would "do our own thing" next year if his demands were not met, interpreted by some as a threat to leave Nato.

However, Emmanuel Macron and Giuseppe Conte, the leaders of France and Italy, later denied that Mr Trump had made an explicit threat to leave the 29-country alliance.

Mr Trump's remarks prompted Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato Secretary-General, to call an emergency session of leaders, asking the heads of Ukraine and Georgia - countries not yet part of the group - to leave the room.

Later in the day, at an impromptu press conference lasting about 40 minutes, Mr Trump claimed he had secured new pledges to increase defence spending from other leaders.

"Everyone has agreed to substantially up their commitment. They are going to up it at levels they have never thought of before," he said at Nato's headquarters.

The US president played down reports he had threatened to walk away, repeatedly talking up the importance of Nato in marked contrast to his comments leading up to the summit. "I believe in Nato," Mr Trump said, saying it was "fine-tuned machine" that was "very important" to the security of Europe and America.

He added: "We're unified, very strong, no problem."

Mr Trump repeated calls for Nato allies to spend 4per cent of GDP on defence rather than 2per cent and took credit for increases in defence spending since he took office.

The US president's triumphant tone at the press conference contrasted with reports of testy exchanges during Thursday morning's meeting, said to have triggered "panic" in the room.

Mr Trump's claim that the allies had agreed new defence spending was firmly rebutted by other world leaders.

Mr Conte said: "Italy has inherited spending commitments that we haven't changed. So there is no additional spending."

In his closing news conference, Mr Stoltenberg said Mr Trump had injected a "new sense of urgency" into the discussions on "burden-sharing".

On Mr Trump's private comments, Mr Macron said: "President Trump never at any moment, either in public or in private, threatened to withdraw from Nato."

Jeremy Hunt, in his first interview since taking over from Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary, said other Nato allies should be hitting the 2 per cent target.

'Very nice note' President praises message from Kim

Donald Trump yesterday tweeted a letter from Kim Jong-un heralding "epochal progress" in relations with the US.

Mr Trump said he had received a "very nice note" from the North Korean leader in which Kim praised last month's Singapore summit as the start of a "meaningful journey".

Kim said he had "invariable trust and confidence" in Mr Trump and looked forward to their next meeting.

Source: Daily Telegraph (London), Jul 13, 2018, p7, 1p