

## Trump praises Morrison, asks why Turnbull is no longer PM



“It’s going to be a great relationship,” Donald Trump told Scott Morrison during their meeting at the G20 in Buenos Aires. Pic: AAP

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An hour ago December 1, 2018

Donald Trump has quizzed Scott Morrison over the leadership spill and asked why Malcolm Turnbull was no longer prime minister, in a 25-minute private meeting on the sidelines of the G20 today in which the US President also praised Australia’s policy shift on Iran and increasing a strategic presence in the Pacific.

Mr Morrison confirmed that the President had asked how he had come to the leadership, having only met with Malcolm Turnbull as PM in the White House at the beginning of the year. “Well, they have their inquiries,” Mr Morrison told journalists following the formal one-on-one meeting. “And when you describe the parliamentary system, I mean it’s a foreign system to presidential system...it’s readily understood.”

When asked if Mr Trump had asked why Mr Turnbull wasn’t sitting in the chair Mr Morrison confirmed the two had discussed the spill. “We ran through what the events were,” Mr Morrison said.

Mr Trump made it clear he supported the policy direction under Mr Morrison. “It’s an honour to be here with the Prime Minister of Australia, Prime Minister Morrison,” Mr Trump said after the meeting, which wrapped up at 5.30am

(AEDT). “We just got to know each other and so far so good, I have to tell you. I think it’s going to be a great relationship, and I certainly anticipate having a great relationship. “I know you’ve done a very good job in a very short period of time, you’ve done a lot of things that they’ve wanted to be done, that’s why you’re sitting right here. “So I congratulate you, and it’s an honour and we will be with Australia and you all the way.”

Mr Morrison, who had opened the second session of the world leader’s summit this morning, said he had raised the protracted trade war between the US and China in the meeting, telling Mr Trump that Australia believed that it was harming the global economy. But he said he was sympathetic to the US position, suggesting China needed to make concessions.

“With President Trump it’s the same point I have made with him and Vice President (Mike) Pence as I’ve had the opportunity to do in the open sessions as well, and that is we are friends but we, like all other countries here know, that tensions between the G20 have a big impact on the broader global economy. “From the meeting I had with the President and the vice president two weeks ago...the suggestion that the path they are pursuing has a protectionist motivation is false.

“They are looking for a better arrangement...they are looking to trade over next 20 or 30 years which is better than it has been in the past. “It is not about shutting world trade down - it’s looking for better.”

Mr Morrison said his controversial proposal to potentially follow the US and move Australia’s embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem – a contested city which Israel claims as its rightful capital – was not raised in the meeting, as he had discussed it at length with Vice President Pence at APEC.

However, he said Mr Trump had welcomed Mr Morrison’s review of Australia’s position on the Iran nuclear deal, which the US has withdrawn from, claiming they were on the same page.” “I advised him that we have a without-prejudice process underway and we both share the threat of financing of terrorism,” Mr Morrison said. “He very much welcomed (that).”

Australian officials claimed the meeting was held behind closed doors, with no staff or advisers present, and had been a “warm discussion”.

The two talked about Pacific policy, presumably Chinese influence in the region, North Korea and the Iran nuclear deal.

The Weekend Australian understands the Trump administration views Mr Morrison as a hardliner on border protection and has looked favourably on the Prime Minister's pushback against Iran and his review considering shifting Australia's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Senior Morrison government sources said a meeting on the sidelines of the G20 had always been on the agenda, despite earlier reports of a snub. Mr Trump had cancelled a planned meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has faced international condemnation over a naval assault on Ukraine and had earlier suggested that there was no planned meeting with Australia.

Mr Morrison held his first bilateral meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss the submarines project which he claimed was back on track after a dispute over the contract. "We made a lot of progress there, the SPA (submarine partnership agreement) is progressing extremely well," Mr Morrison told reporters after the meeting. "We agreed that we can elevate that back up to leader-level to ensure it's finalised in the near term."

The theme of this year's G20 meeting, "building a global consensus", has been overshadowed, as it has in the past, by security concerns over Russian belligerence and the rise of protectionism fuelled by the US-China trade conflict.

With the US President and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping due to meet tomorrow, hopes of an agreement had faded, with Mr Trump sending mixed messages ahead of the summit. "I think we're very close to doing something with China, but I don't know that I want to do it because what we have right now is billions and billions of dollars coming into the United States in the form of tariffs or taxes," Mr Trump had said. "So I really don't know. But I will tell you that I think China wants to make a deal. I'm open to making a deal. But, frankly, I like the deal we have right now."

The Weekend Australian understands that the Australian-led global growth target agreed to by the world's major economies in 2014 has also been removed from this year's G20 agenda amid the US-China trade crisis. Australian officials are believed to have failed in attempts over past days to revive the formal agreement that bound member countries to grow their collective economies by at least 2.1 per cent by this year.

Australian sources confirmed the G20 had failed to meet the target, which was not "explicitly" on the agenda and had been put off until the end of the year or early next year. The Brisbane Action Plan, secured by Tony Abbott and Joe

Hockey when Australia hosted the 2014 G20 in Brisbane, was forecast to add \$2 trillion to the world economy.

The Weekend Australian understands member nations believe the US-China trade war took precedent, with world leaders urging Mr Trump and Mr Xi to reach a de-escalation agreement. A report released in October singled out Australia as a potential casualty and revised down annual economic growth forecasts for next year as a result.

Mr Morrison will today meet EU leaders to talk about the WTO and an upcoming free trade deal, and Brazilian President Michel Temer to discuss boosting trade.

Putin's handshake with Saudi prince

Earlier, Mr Trump "exchanged pleasantries" with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has come under global criticism over his possible role in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. However Russian [President Vladimir Putin gave Prince Mohammed an enthusiastic greeting](#) at the gathering of leaders. The two men beamed widely and clasped hands in something of a cross between a handshake and a high-five. The crown prince patted Mr Putin's hand three times for emphasis as the two leaders took their seats next to each other.

Mr Putin is due to hold bilateral talks with Prince Mohammed, who is trying to rebuild his image after the killing of Mr Khashoggi, the Washington Post columnist and royal family critic, inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

On the sidelines of the summit French President Emmanuel Macron told the crown prince that Europe would insist on international experts being part of the investigation into Khashoggi's murder. In a five-minute exchange, Macron conveyed "very firm" messages to the prince over the killing and the need to find a political solution for the situation in Yemen, an Elysee Palace official said.

The Saudi Gazette newspaper posted a video of the meeting online showing the two speaking in hushed tones with their heads close together. In the audio, it is possible to make out the prince saying "don't worry", to which Macron responds "I am worried". Later in the one-minute clip Macron says: "You never listen to me" and the crown prince replies: "I will listen, of course". At the end Macron can be heard saying "I am a man of my word".

Trade deal

In other developments, Mr Trump teamed up with the leaders of Canada and Mexico to sign a revised North American trade pact, a deal that fulfils a key political pledge by the American president but faces an uncertain future in the U.S. Congress.

The celebratory moment was dimmed by ongoing differences over Mr Trump's steel and aluminium tariffs, as well as plans for massive lay-offs in the US and Canada by General Motors.

The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement is meant to replace the 24-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement, which Mr Trump has long denigrated as a "disaster."

Mr Trump appeared with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and outgoing Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto at the Group of 20 nations summit in Buenos Aires for the formal signing ceremony. Each country's legislature must also approve the agreement.

"It's been long and hard. We've taken a lot of barbs and a little abuse and we got there," Mr Trump said of the pact. "It's great for all our countries."

With Agencies

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