

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION SHOW
AM AGENDA
WEDNESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2016**

KIERAN GILBERT, HOST: This is AM agenda with me now, the Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles. Mr Marles, thanks very much for your time. First of all, Kevin Rudd, scathing assessment of the Turnbull asylum seeker policy. What's your take on this? Is it revenge for the fact that we didn't back him for the UN?

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: No, I think this is an important contribution by Kevin, there is much in Kevin's piece that I think a lot of Australians will find appealing. Kevin obviously comes to this from some authority in terms of the role that he played during his term in government. Both the first term and indeed negotiating the regional resettlement arrangement with PNG in 2013. So I think it's a useful contribution.

GILBERT: Is it revising history though, given he is the one that put in the PNG solution in the first place?

MARLES: The PNG, regional resettlement arrangement I think has played a very important role and Kevin articulates that role in bringing an end to the journey between Java and Christmas Island. In fact, it more than any other decision of an Australian government, has been the major factor in seeing a reduction in the flow of asylum seeker vessels and as a result, a reduction in the drownings at sea. But Kevin certainly didn't envisage that there would be people, the same people indeed on Manus island three years later, and that resettlement would have been an abject failure on the part of the Turnbull, part of the Coalition, part of Turnbull government now and really point that Kevin makes which is absolutely right - this government has failed to find resettlement options for those on Manus and indeed those on Nauru.

GILBERT: But this might well be the first plank of that particular approach. I mean we don't know what these countries are but Laura Jayes, my colleague the other night reported that there will be a multilateral deal, that this is the first or the foundation for that particular deal and it will be first world, developed nations that people will be resettled to. If that's the case, will you back it?

MARLES: Well firstly, we need to see people leaving Manus and Nauru and we have been arguing for a long time now that resettlement options with third countries

need to be negotiated and found by this government and the government have failed. So that's been our view all along. In terms of this legislative proposal, the government have failed to explain any rationale of motive for it at all. Who knows what they are actually seeking.

GILBERT: You might still back it?

MARLES: Well who knows what they are seeking to do. Well we'll see when we actually get the legislation and we get a briefing from the government about what it is that they are intending to do. I mean Kieran the politics of this is pretty obvious but the policy behind it, what intention the government has, they have been hopeless in articulating that. We don't want to be cynical about it but it's hard not to be in circumstances where they're not telling us what's going on.

GILBERT: There's been confusion around Labor's position on the South China Sea, whether there would be maritime freedom of navigation patrols through the twelve nautical mile zone of Chinese, reclaimed Chinese territory and so on. Now the government is going to do joint patrols with Indonesia apparently within the South China sea, presumably not within that twelve nautical mile territory, given Julie Bishop said that that's not government policy. But do you welcome the step, at least in terms of joint patrols with Indonesia?

MARLES: Well in terms of working with Indonesia absolutely, that makes perfect sense. I think I was speaking to you a couple of weeks ago where we clearly put, or I clearly put the view that has been our consistent view all along which is that we support freedom of navigation which asserts the UN convention on the law of the sea. That's a very important principle to maintain, and that obviously embodies the decision that was made by the court of arbitration in relation to the reclaimed areas that China has been active in. Now it is important that we are working with regional neighbours in relation to that as well. And so, to that extent -

GILBERT: But that's still pretty vague, I mean you haven't explicitly said. Cause Penny Wong for example has said that your position is the same as the government's on this. You're saying there is a point of difference, there is a contraction between yours and Penny Wong's position.

MARLES: No absolutely not, Penny Wong and I are saying precisely the same thing. We assert freedom of navigation, rather we support freedom of navigation which asserts the UN convention on the law of the sea.

GILBERT: The government does the same – is that what you're saying? So you have the same policy as the government?

MARLES: We don't seek to make partisan issue with the government on this point. I actually think it's important in the national interest that there is a degree of bipartisanship.

GILBERT: So it is the same policy?

MARLES: The government can explain itself. I think it would be good if we could see a consistent approach from the government in terms of what they are actually articulating if they're now talking about freedom of navigation operations with Indonesia that's obviously welcome from our point of view. But it's for the government to articulate its position. Our principle has been very clear and has been consistent for a long time now. We have a national interest in the South China Sea, a huge proportion of Australia's trade goes through that sea. We need to be engaging in freedom of navigation which asserts the UN convention on the law of the sea.

GILBERT: So just quickly, yes or no – it's the same as the government's policy? Is that your view?

MARLES: We're not making partisan issue with the government. I am not going to speak for the government. The answer to that question implied me speaking for the government in terms of what they do.

GILBERT: Well Penny Wong did. Penny Wong said yes.

MARLES: I think the only point that Penny is making is that we're not seeking to making a partisan point as against the government here and we're not. We think it would be better in the national interest if there is one position. But it is for the government to clearly express itself, that would be a welcome development.

GILBERT: Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles, appreciate your time as always, a quick break, back in just a moment.