

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
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***SUBJECT/S: Syria; Turnbull government's failure in the US relationship;
China; Turnbull government's jobs and growth failure***

KIERAN GILBERT: Joining me now, the Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles. Mr Marles thanks very much for your time. To this developing news this morning, a ceasefire finally in place in Aleppo but not before further slaughter of civilians.

RICHARD MARLES: Well, I mean obviously the ceasefire is good news but I do agree with our Foreign Minister. I think that what we've seen play out in Syria, and in recent times specifically in Aleppo, is an appalling humanitarian disaster. It is really the issue which is defining more than any other the movement on a global scale of people fleeing persecution and war. It's having a huge impact on the globe. It would be a living hell for anyone who lived in that part of the world. Julie Bishop is right - there needs to be a solution to this and it's very important that everyone understands that in the context of the carnage that has been playing out there.

GILBERT: In the context of that carnage and Russia's culpability in it, then we see this appointment from the President elect Trump of Rex Tillerson, someone who has worked at Exxon Mobile for many years but has close ties to Vladimir Putin. What's your reaction to this appointment of Secretary of State? He's got to get through the confirmation, as I mentioned earlier, but what's your initial reaction to it?

MARLES: Well, firstly if you're framing that in the context of Syria specifically, to start with we had the King of Jordan here a few weeks ago and I think what is clear is that we do need all the players, and America is a key player, doing everything they can to work through in terms of trying to find a political solution. so I hope that if he is confirmed that Rex Tillerson can play a part in relation to that.

More generally in terms of our relationship with the US, I note the comments of the Foreign Minister in terms of his role at Exxon Mobil and his connections with Australia. I also, though, see the comments of our former ambassador Kim Beazley in the paper today saying Rex Tillerson isn't as well known to the Australian system as other players.

I think he is broadly seen as competent. Obviously we will need to working with Rex Tillerson and we have to give him a go. What this highlights to me is the importance of the Turnbull government being very present with every ounce of energy they have in Washington right now to be working with the transition team and making sure that Australia's interests are articulated to the new Secretary of State and of course to the new President-elect.

The fact that AUSMIN has been allowed to slip this year is not a good sign at all.

GILBERT: But are you reassured by Julie Bishop's comments to me this morning in relation to Kim Beazley's recommendation and urging that Australia get in there and talk to the transition team, that she says they're already doing it. For every appointee, she says they're making sure that Australia's views are heard very soon after those people are announced.

MARLES: I would have a lot more confidence about that if we actually saw AUSMIN happening this year. I think the fact that AUSMIN has been allowed to slip this year is a real failure, and it needs to be explained by the government how they have allowed this occur in this of all years.

Of course it is good to hear that they are speaking with the transition team, but we would expect nothing less as an Australian people and we really need to be very present in the US right now. Our national interest is absolutely at stake in making sure that we articulate this with our key alliance partner and the fact that AUSMIN has not happened makes me feel very worried.

GILBERT: One of the policies that underpinned security and balance in this region over the last four decades has been the One China policy. Both the United States and Australia have that same view. Are you worried about what you've heard from Donald Trump in this regard? And Beijing's response has been serious concern at this stage, but that could escalate.

MARLES: Well again what I think it highlights is the need for Australia to be making very plain in Washington what our interests are, and what we believe the alliance's interest are, if you like, in East Asia.

The recognition of Beijing and the recognition of a One China policy, which we've had for many decades now, is fundamental. It is a very important piece of architecture in terms of regional stability and there are a whole lot of diplomatic forms which exist in terms of the way countries engage with Taiwan. They matter, too, and so it is important in my view that what has been the practice over the last few decades continues to be followed.

I think I've said to you previously I don't think that Twitter is the best medium for foreign policy or diplomacy. These are critically important issues and they need to be dealt with very sensitively.

GILBERT: Indeed. The question is, though, is Taiwan in this process being used as a bargaining chip, do you think, in terms of Trump ahead of his taking the White

House, moving into the Oval Office and then therefore the first real talks with Xi Jinping, the Chinese President.

MARLES: Well, look, who knows, but what is clear is that it's hard, impossible really, to get a sense of any of that through 140 characters, which is why I think everyone needs to be careful about the way in which they go about that, but it is clear that a One China policy and our recognition of Beijing is a fundamental piece of the architecture in this part of the world. You've heard me talk a lot about the significance of the alliance and the importance of America's presence in East Asia - that's absolutely critical as well and I'm a strong proponent of the Alliance.

But make no mistake - we recognise Beijing and a One China policy. That's been a bipartisan position in Australia for a long time now and that is really important, too.

GILBERT: That's true, it's been a long standing position and no argument about it.

Let's finish off, if we can, on domestic politics and particularly the Treasurer's speech today, going to making a pitch to regions doing it tough, areas seen as dislocated from the better parts of economy right now and it's a similar narrative that we heard through the Rust Belt in the United States and the Trump election win and now also through Brexit, but now this is a local version and the government doing its best to try and ease those concerns, Mr Marles?

MARLES: It's a joke. That's all I can say. It is a complete joke.

The idea that we have had an election this year where the government has talked about jobs and growth ad nauseam has not been able to put anything else behind that three-word slogan, just 'jobs and growth', and what it turns out that means is that after six months of inaction following a three-year term in government where basically manufacturing was goaded offshore, that their conclusion to this is to ask the Productivity Commission to find out who's doing it tough and what the government should do in response.

I can tell you in terms of my electorate, and I can tell Scott Morrison in terms of my electorate, places like Norlane and Corio, Whittington, they're doing it tough. Indeed every MP around the country if their worth their salt will be able to tell Scott Morrison right now who's doing it tough in their neck of the woods and the kinds of things that we need to see happening.

I tell you one thing - having a \$50 billion tax cut for big business, including the likes of the banks, isn't going to help anyone in Norlane and Corio. That's not how you help battlers, and so this is nothing other than window dressing and I don't think any of us can have any confidence that this is going to change the reality of a single person's life.

GILBERT: Richard Marles joining me from Geelong this morning. Thank you for that as always.