

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
AM AGENDA SKY NEWS
8 FEBRUARY 2017**

SUBJECT/S: *China-US relations, Australia-US relations*

KIERAN GILBERT: With me now, the Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles. Richard Marles, thanks very much for your time.

You heard Julie Bishop saying that the Chinese Foreign Minister is being constructive, wants to deepen ties between Beijing and the United States. That follows some more calmer language from General Matthis, the new Defence Secretary in the Trump administration. That's all quite encouraging, given the start of Donald Trump, when he took the White House, and some of those messages to China.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Of course. You know, our interest in this part of the world is to have stability, a rules-based international order. It's on the basis of that that we've been able to build our national prosperity, and so having matters resolved through negotiation, discussion, calm, sober interaction, of course that is really welcome.

You know I visited Pacific Command, PACOM, in Hawaii last year, and you get a real sense when you go there about the degree of dialogue that there is between the U.S. and China, and there is a lot of sophistication in that relationship and I do think both the comments of General Mattis, Secretary Mattis, and also the comments of the Foreign Minister Wang are very encouraging.

GILBERT: They are encouraging, but then you've also got, to counter that, the language that Rex Tillerson, the incoming Secretary of State, used at his Senate confirmation about a blockade and other criticisms of China that Donald Trump made, for example via Twitter, so it's quite unpredictable right now how all of this plays out.

MARLES: And I think that is an important word, because what we want to see here is predictability. We want reliability in the relationships that we engage with everyone - obviously with our key alliance partner, the United States, but also in the dealings that we have with China and other countries in the region predictability, reliability is the key, and that's what we want to see now.

We all have our interests, and Australia does have interests in the South China Sea and we've made those plain, and Labor has certainly made them plain, in relation to China. We have so much of our trade that goes through the South China Sea. The UN Convention on the law of the sea is very important because we need to have our trade being able to pass through there, but it's important that those interests that all countries have are mediated, worked through, by negotiation, and I think the comments that you've seen in the last few days are encouraging in that respect.

GILBERT: Did it frustrate you as someone who is a strong supporter, has been for a long time, of the alliance with the United States, those comments that Donald Trump made in relation to allies and in the same breath as being critical of the refugee deal spoke of allies taking advantage of the United States.

MARLES: Well, I mean America has interests as well and they can obviously-

GILBERT: -But you can hardly suggest Australia has taken advantage of the US?

MARLES: You are absolutely right about that.

I mean America has a right to talk through what it needs and wants in respect to its allies, but you're right: we've been a very reliable ally of the United States. We do pull our weight around the world, and it's important that we are making that point in the context of our relationship with the United States.

I've said this a lot - it's important that we continue to advocate within the context of the alliance what we need from the United States and that is actually a continued presence in East Asia. The truth is that the United States could not have and does not have a more reliable and dependable ally than Australia.

GILBERT: Finally, I want to ask you about Cory Bernardi, his quitting of the Liberal Party, but the day-to-day-reality in the Senate is that more than likely he will be voting with the government on the lion's share of its most of its bills through the parliament.

MARLES: Look, coming back here, Kieran the thing that's really struck me: how bad is this government going? It is absolutely astonishing. The stench of death, of political death, around Malcolm Turnbull and so many of his government MPs can be felt in every corridor in this building.

GILBERT: Isn't it premature to say that, given they've just won re-election?

MARLES: You talk to government MPs and what's on their lips at the moment is what they're doing beyond this place. I mean they're focusing on a world outside of this building. They're not thinking about the governing of this country and it's a real concern.

Absolutely, it's premature. We need this government to be focused on actually running the country, but they themselves are walking around this building talking about their own doom. I think they're focused on themselves. They're absolutely preoccupied by their internal struggles.

Cory Bernardi, I think it's an act of ego and he'll be a forgotten man within a week, but really at the end of the day he is a symptom of a malaise within the Coalition which is absolutely detrimental to the way in which this country is being currently government.

GILBERT: Richard Marles, appreciate your time. Thanks.