

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
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SUBJECTS: Prime Minister's trip to Indonesia, Peter Dutton's homeland security push, North Korea, US alliance.

KIERAN GILBERT: First though we're joined live by Richard Marles the Shadow Defence Minister. Mr. Marles, you'd support the Prime Minister making that very brief but - in my view - important visit to Jakarta after the invitation was extended by the President Joko Widodo.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well, look the relationship with Indonesia is a critical bilateral relationship. The Indian Ocean Rim Association is also a very significant regional body that Australia has recently chaired, and indeed we were one of the instigators of it and it seeks to build a community around the Indian Ocean which needs to happen. So, they're both very important reasons to be there.

GILBERT: What's your view on the idea of a Homeland Security Department? This idea has been floated a number of times, I think back to Kevin Rudd's prime ministership. It was again discussed in 2014, put on ice, now under consideration again.

MARLES: Well, I think we all ought to be concerned about the way in which this debate is currently running. Keeping our people safe is obviously the first order of any government, and it's right that we be thinking about how we can do that in the best possible way. But right now all we're hearing is leak and counter-leak around this idea, and it seems to be less around keeping Australians safe and national security and more around trying to support or oppose various individuals within a very fractured government. I mean this is all about power inside the cabinet as we speak right now. It's about power politics, it's not about national security, and in fact our nation's security is the political football which is being used to play out that power struggle. All of that ought to be of enormous concern to everyone.

GILBERT: But surely the final judgment, while there are some power plays obviously under way, that the final judgment would be made on the merits of the case by the Prime Minister and the National Security Committee. You would assume that that would be the case.

MARLES: Well I wouldn't assume anything about the way in which this government is operating right now. They are a total circus, and this is a disgrace, the fact that they are using national security as a political football around individual's ambitions.

You're absolutely right that that ought to be the case, that it ought to be the policy merits which determine the outcome of this debate, and I think the simple point to make here is if there is a proposition that the government has, well then give it to us and we'll have a look at it. Put it out there and let's have a discussion about it. If we can do this in a better way, if the administrative arrangements can be done in a more simple way, well let's have that discussion - but let's see the proposal first. That's not what we've got at the moment. What we've got is people's ambitions being put on trial, an internal fight within a fractured government which is a complete circus, and they are using our national security as the political football to wage their fight, and that is the most concerning thing about what we've seen in the last couple of days.

GILBERT: And as we heard earlier in the program Samantha Maiden reporting to us that ASIO and the Federal Police have argued against the change via the security committee of government, the security committee of cabinet. What do you make of that intervention, given that this push it seems is coming from the head of the Immigration Department. He is certainly a strong supporter of it, as we understand it, this idea of a homeland security department. You are, of course, a former spokesperson in that area.

MARLES: I think one of the things is that nothing is certain here at all, and all of this is happening in the shadows. We can't be clear about the position of any of the agencies or any individuals here because we only know this debate through rumours and leaks. We hear reported concerns, we hear reported ambitions and we hear reported supporters, but there is no one actually out there having a proper discussion - and that is our view here, that if there is something to be debated, if there is a better way of going about things, we're open to having the conversation, but let's have it in the clear light of day so that everyone can put their case and we can actually, with some certainty, get a sense of what the various opinions are out there for and against an idea of this kind. Right now this is all happening in the shadows, and it speaks says everything about how dysfunctional this government is.

GILBERT: A broader regional issue now, and if you needed a reminder of how volatile the Korean Peninsula is, we've seen it overnight, the Chinese Foreign Ministry warning of consequences for Washington and Seoul after the placement of equipment within range of China in the wake of those North Korean missile tests and launches in recent days in the Sea of Japan. This is a reminder of just how volatile things are, how dangerous things are, particularly given the unpredictability of the new president as well.

MARLES: Well, you're right about the volatility of the Korean peninsula and I think we need to always be mindful that where the volatility starts is squarely in the North Korean camp. The development of their nuclear program, the development of their ballistic missile capability, that is the concern here and the tests that they've undertaken in the last few days should be a concern for everyone, including the rhetoric, I might say, which goes with them. I mean, to hear the North Korean government openly talking about developing a capability to launch such a missile in the direction of Japan I think is deeply concerning. You know, we need to be very careful about what steps are taken on the Korean Peninsula, but there are a couple of things which come through about all of this for me. One is this just says everything, in my mind, about why it's so important that we maintain and see maintained an American presence within East Asia, in Japan and in South Korea. I am heartened by the comments that have come from the White House over the last couple of days in relation to their commitment to the region because that is critically important. And while you know steps need to be thought through very carefully on the Korean peninsula, personally I find it hard to criticize a country for taking steps to defend its own safety.

GILBERT: Indeed, and obviously the proximity is always very much part of the consciousness in Seoul. I want to ask you, though, more broadly about Donald Trump, now, and your view on the US alliance. I know you're a very strong supporter of Australia's relationship with the United States, but I'm wondering - what's your view on the way that the Turnbull administration should handle this? Are you of the school of thought that he should visit as soon as possible or should he sit back and just watch things for a few more months to see how this unfolds with the White House, but also the defence apparatus, the Defence Secretary and others and just see where the power rests?

MARLES: Your question is whether Malcolm Turnbull should visit America?

GILBERT: Well, the question is should he be you know doing that sooner rather than later, or as many commentators believe he should sit back and wait for things to settle down a bit. We're a couple months in of course the Trump administration has been, you know, volatile to say the least, already.

MARLES: Look I think first I think it's very important that this government is advocating as strongly as it can for Australia's interests in the context of the alliance. I've said a number of times in conversations with you on this program that I am, for example, very concerned by the fact that the government let slip an AUSMIN meeting at the end of last year. That's the premier place in which our engagement on the alliance occurs, and I would have thought if there was any year in which an AUSMIN was absolutely critical it was at the end of last year and so that is absolutely essential. I think it is important that we need to be advocating for the alliance at this point in time, but we also need to remember what the alliance is about. It is about providing stability and reliability and dependability within this region. Now, we obviously provide that in the context of our engagement in the alliance. It's very important that we have stable and predictable actions as well in terms of all parties within our region, and I think that's an important position that we need to advocate as well, and in the context of that we need then I think to be very clearly articulating what our interests are in the region. We want stability. We need to have a one-China policy, for example, and again I'm pleased that the White House is now making that clear in the way it articulates that issue. So, I think it is a time where we need to be very clear about where we stand on issues in our region. The alliance is obviously a very important part of it and an American presence in East Asia is an important part of it, and what we've seen in the last couple of days on the Korean peninsula highlights that for me.

GILBERT: Richard Marles, appreciate your time. Thanks for that

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