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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**

**RICHO**

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***SUBJECTS: US alliance; China; North Korea; Syria***

**GRAHAM RICHARDSON:** Now obviously the ascension to the throne, if you like, of Donald Trump somewhat changes the world. He's got a different view to Obama and I think everyone other previous President of the United States and he seems to have this individual style that's very hard for the rest of the world to work out.

Now, given that I can't find out what the government thinks because the Minister of Defence won't do interview, I'm wondering what the opposition thinks. How does this effect, say, our relationship with China?

**RICHARD MARLES:** Look, it's a really good point to make, Graham, and the question that comes out of it that you've asked is exactly right. When you think about our alliance with the United States, it's about shared values that we both have, the rule of law in our own countries, but more than that we aspire to trying to create the rule of law as a global order.

In turn, what underpins that is a sense of predictability about how international events and international issues are dealt with. Now, in President Trump we've got a person who really makes a virtue of being unpredictable. He says and does things in a way we haven't seen before, and there is a whole lot of questions that that then raises.

I think what it means for us is that - for someone like me who's always been an advocate of the US alliance, and I probably define one end of that spectrum within the Labor party - a sense of reflex and instinct about the US is not enough to get us through now. We really need to be working on every issue that comes up and thinking about it in our national interest.

South China Sea as an example of that. Our national interest there is not the sovereignty disputes which go on in relation to various reefs. It's about freedom of commerce because so much of Australia's commerce goes through that sea.

Therefore, the rules of the sea, the UN Convention on the law of the sea, navigation, that's what matters to us, so any actions we take ought to be directed to that.

I think we kind of need to go back to first principles in terms of the way in which we deal with issues because that reflex, that instinct that we might have had in the past, just isn't going to get us through when we've got a person who tends to be unpredictable.

**RICHO:** Isn't that the problem, though? You can prepare for one eventuality and he can change his mind overnight. It's going to be awfully difficult, not just for you, but for the world, one would imagine, to try and react to this fast enough.

**MARLES:** Again, I think that's a really important point as well, and in a sense that perhaps why we need to be careful about thinking only in terms of reflex and instinct, because it is hard to draw a line through words said and actions undertaken by the US. We've got to be very careful that we know what our interests are and that we're acting in accordance with them, and if you're talking about China I don't subscribe to an idea that there are simply good guys and bad guys out there - and even if you had that construct it's not at all right to say that China is one of the bad guys. We have a positive relationship with China and it's been very critical to our economic growth and I've been a big supporter of the China free trade agreement.

China has legitimate interests in the region. They're going to be the largest economy. They will aspire to be a regional power and that's probably fair enough. Our issue there is we want to see China grow, but supporting a rules-based international order as well.

I think we've got to come back to predictability, so when Donald Trump tweets about Taiwan, as an example, we can't go along with that sort of stuff. We support a one-China policy with Beijing as its capital. There are diplomatic forms which apply in relation to Taiwan. We should be following them. It's not in our interest at all to see any of that unsettled, so it's really important that we are very clear-eyed and confident about what our national interest is. That doesn't mean ditching the alliance at all. In fact, I think now is a time to be advocating more for it, but it is being very aware of what our national interests are.

**RICHO:** When it comes to our national interests do we have to worry about a rogue state like North Korea. Can they lob a missile into Australia?

**MARLES:** Well, we certainly should be worried about them and I think the technical answer to that question is they are rapidly developing that capability. I suspect it is more theoretical than real, in terms of Australia being high on their target list, but the point is North Korea is a very destabilising force within our region, and again comments that President Trump made during the election do give concern around allies paying their way, which is obviously an understandable position that the US would take, but for the US to go the next step and in any way withdraw from South Korea or Japan would be of enormous concern. That would raise the very real prospect of a country like either of those feeling the need to go down the path of nuclear weapons and that's clearly not in our interests, so we have a direct interest in what's going on with North Korea, how that issue is resolved.

An American presence in East Asia is utterly critical to doing that, but so too is predictable behaviour so that all of, us and China clearly has a role here to play as well, can be involved in containing the actions of North Korea so they don't represent a threat to the region and to us.

**RICHO:** Yeah, but it would appear now that even the Chinese have pretty poor relations with them. They don't listen to anyone.

**MARLES:** I think China does have a particular role in relation to North Korea. I acknowledge the observation you've just made - there is a degree to which North Korea doesn't listen to anyone, but I think if there is anyone they are going to listen to it's China and so China have a particular role. I'm not saying they can determine outcomes in North Korea, but they certainly have a role to play.

It is an example of why we need to be doing what we can to work cooperatively with China, why we need predictability in the region, and why rules-based international orders matter. A US presence in East Asia matters, but all of that, it's not impossible to work that through with President Trump, obviously, but the unpredictable nature in which President Trump goes about his business – well, it's certainly a new environment for us to work with.

I think there are some things we need to be clear about: we ought to never react to speculation about President Trump. We ought only to react to what he says and what he does, and even then we should be reacting to where America as a nation goes and not to the particular way in which President Trump undertakes politics.

That's not being disrespectful to him at all. It's just saying I think that's how we're going to have to treat our relationship with America. I think it actually is important that we are advocating about the significance of the alliance. It is as important to Australia now as it's ever been, and an American presence in East Asia is as important to Australia now as it's ever been, and I actually think the current circumstances make that more clear rather than less.

**RICHO:** Just to change the subject, when one looks at Syria the disturbing thing to me is that some form of ceasefire in Syria could be organised by Assad and Putin and the West is not even at the table. Is the way Turkey's going a problem for the West?

**MARLES:** Well, Turkey is a very significant player within its region and I think Australia has a role in building the best relationship we can with Turkey. Obviously there are some ways in which we are not alike, but we do share some things. We're both middle-sized powers in global terms, both members of the G20, and there is a lot of opportunity for us to interact with Turkey and I think we can do it on something of the basis of equality. While we're talking about an issue in their backyard, not ours, I actually think that is an important relationship for us to work with.

The situation in Syria is obviously very fraught and there is no immediate outcome likely in relation to the Syrian civil war. Again, though, I think we need to be clear about our interests and why we're there. We're engaged in that part of the world on the invitation of Iraq to contest what was then the expansion of ISIS, and we are now in the business of an effort to support the Iraqi National Army in the defeat of ISIS.

ISIS is the target in that sense. That's where our focus needs to be, and when we are thinking about going forward I think our focus needs to be very much about that question.

The Syrian civil war component of it, which you're describing. It is obviously a terrible set of circumstances, but that is not what we have been involved in up until this point.

**RICHO:** OK, thank you very much for your time, Richard Marles. We hope to talk to you again soon.

**MARLES:** Thanks, Graham.

***ENDS***