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SUBJECT/S: North Korean missile testing, Syrian conflict

KIERAN GILBERT: From Darwin the Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles a range of issues to talk to you about this morning Richard Marles first of all I want to get your reaction to this suspected chemical attack. The latest atrocity in Syria this time in the province of Idlib, Washington the White House believes it is the Assad regime responsible, although the Syrian military at this stage denying that. What's your reaction?

RICHARD MARLES SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well I mean what plays out in Syria just continues to be an unfolding human tragedy. The civil war in Syria has wrought so much death and destruction over so many years. Children particularly have been affected by that. I mean this is a conflict which at times has targeted children but chemical attacks have also been a part of what's happened there and you know I think all of the international community just crying out for there to be some resolution to what's going on in Syria and we call on all parties and particularly the Assad regime to do what they can to bring to an end the carnage the human suffering there is on an unimaginable scale and it giving rise to right now the most significant flow of people seeking asylum and fleeing death and destruction in the world today.

GILBERT: Indeed heartbreaking images out of Idlib that we've seen overnight. Let's look at the other major security issue right now in the world it's really on the Korean Peninsula. That's the threat that Washington is focusing on in a in a big way particularly in the lead up to these talks with President Xi Jinping of China. What's your best hope out of these talks with two very different leaders about to sit down in Florida.

MARLES: Well first it is obviously a great thing that the two leaders are sitting down and we should just take a moment to acknowledge that these are the two most critical relationships that we have and we are the same as many countries in this respect our relationship with China and our relationship with the US and when the

US and the Chinese leaders are talking with each other. The world is a better and safer place, so that's fundamentally a good thing. I think in relation to North Korea it's hard to imagine how we get a resolution to what's happening in North Korea without cooperation between America and China. So I guess my best hope is that they can agree on a on an agreed way forward in terms of how to deal with the North Korean regime. This is the most destabilizing force within our region right now. What the North Koreans are doing both in terms of early years testing their nuclear weapons and gaining that capability and now more recently their ballistic missile tests. All of this creates a sense of instability in the region and we really need America and China working together to try and bring North Korea to a point of some sense.

GILBERT: And in the last couple of minutes we've heard reports of another missile launch from Pyongyang , so this shows no sign of abating despite the fact that those two leaders will be sitting down for talks. It doesn't, well the question is does it help the situation or does it inflame the situation that Donald Trump is talking about unilateral action against North Korea.

MARLES: Well I ultimately think that cooperative action is the best way forward here; I come back to what I said the China and the US working together I think is our best hope of resolution in relation to North Korea. I mean that said obviously American action within the region counts. It matters that America has a presence within South Korea. It matters that America has a presence within Japan and we have argued very strongly about the fact that Australia needs to be advocating to the U.S. government for a continued presence in East Asia. That's very much in Australia's interests so the US presence in its own terms in East Asia on the Korean peninsula in Japan matters, but there's no doubt that cooperation between the US and China and those countries of the immediate region is the best hope of seeing some kind of resolution or at least containing North Korea in terms of their behavior.

GILBERT: Penny Wong your colleague and Shadow Foreign Minister was calling for a broadening of the national security debate in a speech last night in Canberra, she said that, well told the national security conference that the security has a much broader connotation than the mere threat based protective response which a lot of public policy concentrates on. What's the key message that she's trying to articulate there?

MARLES: Well I think Penny made a really important speech last night in Canberra and one of the points that Penny makes is that we need to be looking at the root causes which give rise to security concerns. It's not enough just to put up a barrier and have a reactive sense to national security you've actually got to be thinking about what gives rise to national security threats and she talked and obviously condemn the comments of Pauline Hanson in relation to Islamic immigration to Australia those sort of comments and reactive comments of that kind do nothing to help and ought to be condemned as we have condemned them. But I think the point here is that if in fact the front line when it comes to Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and radical terrorism is the Islamic community itself and working with that community and assisting that community in dealing with this threat goes to the root causes of how we provide for our national security and that community has been fantastic in the way in which it's met this threat, but we need to be working with it and they have the best understanding of what's motivating people to act and how best to meet that

threat and that that comes back to another point that Penny then makes, if our national security community in terms of its diversity needs to reflect the nation that it seeks to protect and that's a really good example of it having people from an Islamic background gives us a much greater insight into how to deal with these particular threats and issues.

GILBERT: Richard Marles, well we're out of time. Thanks for that Shadow Defence Minister live from Darwin.