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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
SUNDAY AGENDA
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SUBJECTS: US alliance, North Korea, immigration

KIERAN GILBERT: Let's talk about that and all the other issues with Richard Marles, who joins us live from Geelong. Good morning, shadow Defence minister.

I want to start with an overarching question, though, after your talks with Mike Pence yesterday. Your leader, Bill Shorten, has said that Donald Trump is barking mad, that he was entirely unsuitable to be president of the United States. Did your meeting with the Vice President yesterday help ease some of those concerns that Labor holds about the administration?

RICHARD MARLES: Firstly, the meeting was warm and cordial. I actually think there was a strong rapport between Mike Pence and Bill Shorten in yesterday's meeting.

I think we have to take this meeting for what it is, and that is we've got a vice president of the United States, very early on in the term of this administration, visiting Australia and that is obviously a good thing. Donald Trump has played the game very differently. We all understand that, but we're talking about the Australian alliance here with America, and it's important we all react to this in a very sober way, that we're not reacting to speculation, we're not reacting to the politics of the moments, and we're taking things as we find them, and right now we've got an American vice president in Australia very early on in the administration. It is obviously a good thing.

GILBERT: The visit comes in the context of that fiery phone call between Trump and Turnbull. Is the alliance now on an even keel?

MARLES: I think the alliance is a very deep relationship, and it exists at a whole lot of levels. It goes beyond the political realm, although obviously the political leaders of the day are an important part of the relationship. I think the relationship is in a good place, and it is as important to Australia now as it has ever been, and we have

issues within the alliance that we need to continue to advocate about, most particularly the continued presence of America in East Asia, and all the signs from the Vice President yesterday in respect of that were positive.

I think the relationship's in a good place, and it remains very important and relevant to Australia.

PAUL KELLY: Richard Marles, does the Labor Party support the current position which President Trump is taking in relation to North Korea: that is, saying that the time for patience is over, saying that the United States administration wants this solved, wants this resolved, and is really stepping up the pressure. Does Labor essentially agree with that American framework?

MARLES: I think we are seeing a harder edge from the US in respect of North Korea. I don't think that conflict on the Korean Peninsula is particularly likely. I think there is a lot of avenues, and a lot of water that goes under the bridge in the immediate term.

I think that having presented that harder edge, which the United States have, the ball is now largely in China's court, and in that respect I actually think the early signs are positive. China is saying things and demonstrating a will in relation to North Korea which does appear to be a bit different, and they – China – are talking about the fact that if we're going to deal with North Korea it needs to be China, America and the whole world dealing with the question of North Korea. In that, the Chinese are absolutely right.

I actually think that there is a lot of positives out of this in terms of the way the world is reacting to North Korea, but there needs to be, because the idea of this state seeking to weaponise intercontinental ballistic missiles with a nuclear warhead is obviously a very frightening prospect.

KELLY: I just want to nail this down: is Labor on the same page as Malcolm Turnbull in calling upon the Chinese to accept leadership on this North Korean issue and bring pressure to bear on North Korea? That's Turnbull's public position. It's a very strong public position. Is that Labor's position, too?

MARLES: Ultimately the Prime Minister can talk for himself. China-

KELLY: -Well, he has spoken for himself. The Prime Minister spoke at length about this yesterday in very strong language. The question is: is Labor on the same page or not?

MARLES: I suppose the point I'm trying to make, Paul, is we're not going to be defined in terms of the Prime Minister's position. We do seek to pursue, if it's possible, bipartisanship in this arena, and it is our view that China has a particular role in relation to North Korea. That is obvious and clear.

I do think that China are taking some positive steps in a way which is different to what has happened in the immediate past in relation to putting pressure on North Korea, and that is a good thing. We do need to see China acting, and that is

important. I do think that a harder edge being presented by America in respect of North Korea is not a bad thing.

KELLY: So do you think it's fair enough, then, for the United States to say that all options should be on the table? Do you think that is a sensible degree of pressure coming from the United States, having the key American official saying all options are on the table?

MARLES: I do note that comment, Paul, but I also note that the Americans are saying that they feel optimistic that this can be resolved without conflict, that they are positive in terms of how they think the relationship with China is going in respect of dealing with North Korea. They have talked quite positively about that, and positively about the recent meeting between President Trump and President Xi, so sure, I hear what America is saying relation to that.

I think there is a harder edge being places in respect of North Korea. I don't think that's a bad thing at all, but I also note that there's a lot of comment coming from the US as well about optimism to resolve this – not by military means but by other means, and trying to engage China in the process, and, indeed, the early signs from China are positive about being engaged in that process.

GILBERT: Richard Marles, just stay where you are, if you can. We'll get back to you in just a moment.

[INTERVIEW BREAK]

GILBERT: This is Sunday Agenda. With me Paul Kelly, and our guest is Richard Marles, the shadow Defence Minister. You heard the former ambassador to Australia Jeffrey Bleich welcome the fact that the Trump administration has re-committed to that refugee deal. You'd be of a similar view, wouldn't you, Richard, in terms of that being a good development?

MARLES: Yes, I am. I think that it is an important step that's been taken by the Trump administration to accept that arrangement. It is obviously an important arrangement. We've been advocating for a long time that those on Manus and Nauru needed to get off, to be removed from those islands, and there needed to be third country resettlement options developed for them.

The US is the only thing the Turnbull government has come up with. It's really important that it proceeds.

KELLY: As far as Labor's concerned, Richard Marles, what does Labor believe ought to happen with the people left on Nauru and Manus who are not taken by the United States?

MARLES: There need to be options found for them. The principles are simple. I absolutely accept, Paul, that the practicality of this often is not, but those that are not found to be genuine refugees should be facilitated back to their homes, and those who are found to be genuine refugees, there need to be third country resettlement options found for them.

I would expect that most in the latter category will – and by saying most I suspect pretty well all in the latter category – will find a place in the United States. Obviously that remains to be seen, but it's important options are found for them.

In the immediate term, relieving some pressure on Manus and Nauru, having some people taken from Manus and Nauru, given hope and given resettlement options elsewhere in the world is a really important first step.

Ultimately, the process of offshore processing needs to be sustainable and it's not sustainable if there's no flow. It's not sustainable if people are just put in a holding pen indefinitely. That's why an option of this kind needs to be developed.

GILBERT: There are tensions on Manus. We saw the rampage from members of the PNG military. There's confusion as to what the catalyst for that. The Minister, when he spoke to David Speers on Thursday night, suggested there was an alleged attempt to take a five year old into the facility. It's been denied very strongly by the detainees. Have you been briefed on this at all? Do you have any advice on that situation?

MARLES: I don't have any advice on that and I haven't been briefed. I guess I would just caution people in respect of moving down the path of speculation.

What I do know from previous incidents is that quite often what's in the public domain early on ends up being very different from what ultimately happened, and we're talking about people's lives and we're talking about people who are in the most desperate of circumstances, and it's really important that there is accuracy.

I guess I just urge all those who seek to put their voice into this domain to do so in a way which is based on facts.

KELLY: I'd like to ask you, Labor's early response to Malcolm Turnbull's announcement on citizenship this week, when he put greater emphasis on Australian values in citizenship. In particular, there was the requirement about English language proficiency before citizenship. Secondly, there was the four-year provision, and thirdly there was the much greater need to demonstrate integration into Australia.

Can you give us an idea as to what Labor's position is on those three items?

MARLES: The question of demonstrating Australian values, of course we would want anyone who seeks to become an Australian citizen to demonstrate that they have and will abide by Australian values. I might say that has already been the case.

In terms of English language, Paul, English language matters, but I don't think excellent grammar is a pre-requisite for becoming an Australian citizen. I wonder what the English language proficiency of Frank Lowy was when he became a citizen? I wonder what the English language proficiency of the current New South Welshman of the year was when he became a citizen? We need to be very careful when we put in place measures such as that.

In terms of the 457 domain, having a sensible skilled migration program in this country is absolutely in our nation's interest. It has, really, since European settlement, been the backbone of the Australian economy. We absolutely recognise that.

Within the context of that it's important that when jobs come up Australians are given the first crack at those jobs, but that is about Australians being appropriately trained and that employers are making an effort to employ Australians.

Now, in none of the reforms that were announced during the week are issues around that addressed, and I think this goes to the ultimate point here: I don't think anyone's under any illusions as to what Malcolm Turnbull was doing last week. The politics of this is palpable, and it is rank.

What has happened to Malcolm Turnbull is astounding. Is this really what it was about in rolling Tony Abbott, that Malcolm Turnbull would end up in this place? Is this why he ended up in parliament? Ultimately, it seems to me if this is where he was going to be, I don't understand why there was a move to remove Tony Abbott in the first place, because that's all we've now got.

KELLY: Just on this point, one of the features of the new policy is that the 457 stream is de-linked from the permanent immigration program. Now, that is a significant change. Does Labor agree with that or not?

MARLES: I think you've got to be really careful about steps that are taken in relation to the detail of migration programs, because they end up having a big impact.

One of the things that's occurred with the 457 program over the years is that a lot of people have come to Australia, ultimately become permanent residents and then Australian citizens initially through the 457 program. There has been, if you like, a 'try before you buy' dimension to the program. That's meant that those who have ultimately come to Australia and become permanent residents, become citizens, have been able to settle more quickly because their starting point has been a job. We need to be careful about what steps are taken here.

Our issue in relation to 457s has always been our concern that Australians are given the first crack at a job and bolstering up those measures which deal with that, and none of that is addressed in what was announced during the week.

I think the other point I want to make in relation to this is our other concern with the 457 program, and indeed the other temporary work programs – that is, the student visa program and the working holidaymaker visa program – is that those who are on them and working have often been the subject of enormous exploitation here in Australia.

Again, nothing is being done to address that.

When I was the shadow minister I had ambassadors from other countries coming to me and talking about their concern about the way their citizens were being treated in Australia. That's a huge issue. We need to be dealing that side of the equation as

well. None of that was mentioned by Malcolm Turnbull during the week, and I think we understand why.

GILBERT: I want to return to one of the issues that Paul asked you about earlier, Richard Marles, in relation to North Korea, and specifically comments made by their foreign ministry spokesperson overnight that if Australia persists in following the US moves to isolate and stifle the DPRK and remains a shock brigade of the US master, this will be a suicidal act of coming within the range of the nuclear strike of the strategic force of the DPRK. What do you say to that sort of bellicose language out of North Korea? Do we take it seriously?

MARLES: This sort of language has been business as usual for the North Korean regime. They are saying it relation to Australia, but they have said it, obviously, in relation to the US and in the last few hours, or 24 hours, there've also been veiled threats in respect of China coming out of North Korea, so this is just the normal course of rhetoric that you hear from that regime.

It goes to the ultimate point that a regime of that kind seeking to weaponise an intercontinental ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead is an enormous concern, and that's why this does require the world to resolve the situation, and as I said earlier I think a harder edge from America is not a bad thing. Seeking to engage China, and the early signs from China willing to be engaged, is a positive step as well. The Chinese are right when they say that the world needs to deal with the issue of North Korea, and we ought to be a part of that.

KELLY: Just on that point, Richard Marles, are you actually saying that the Labor Party is not prepared to accept a nuclear North Korea, which in the future would have the capacity to deliver nuclear weapons to northern Australia? Is that sort of situation unacceptable to Labor in the same way Donald Trump is saying that's unacceptable to the United States in relation to America?

MARLES: That set of circumstances, Paul, would be of deep concern to Australia. That's the first thing. The capacity to deliver a nuclear warhead to the Australian continent is clearly a matter of enormous concern for our nation.

Even before you get to that point, and this needs to be understood as well, we've got three of our largest trading partners, three of our five largest trading partners, in that part of the world: Japan, China and South Korea. When you think about Australia's economic interaction with the world, it is in large measure our economic interaction with that precise part of the world.

We have an enormous interest in a stable Korean Peninsula and stability in that region, and it's why we do need to be active in this. It's why it very much matters to Australia that the issue of North Korea ultimately does have some resolution, and it's why we ought to be concerned about what is being said from North Korea – but we ought to be encouraged as well by the actions of China and what would appear to be a greater degree of cooperation between China and America in respect of North Korea.

GILBERT: Shadow Defence minister Richard Marles live from Geelong – appreciate your time this Sunday morning. Thanks for that.

MARLES: Thank you.

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