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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
LATELINE
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SUBJECTS: Homeland security; ADF's role combatting terrorism

HOST: Richard Marles, thanks for your company tonight.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Good evening, Emma.

HOST: Do we need a new super national security department?

MARLES: Well, I think one of the issues that we've got here is that the Government simply hasn't made out a case for what it's doing. I mean, the first question the Government needs to explain to the Australian people is: what is it that's broken that they are trying to fix?

Right now, all we have really got is a whole lot of speculation, which seems to be more about the ambitions of Peter Dutton than it is about the national interest. We actually have to have a conversation about this, given the significance of what we are talking about.

This is national security. It is as important an area of public policy as there is. If this is as big a change as what's being speculated, there should be a national discussion which precedes it. We have had none of that.

HOST: Is there any merit, do you think, in merging these departments: intelligence, the AFP, Border Security, Immigration?

MARLES: Well, again, what I would want to hear from is the security agencies themselves, to get a sense from them about how the system is working from their point of view now; what would be better; and what problems, if any, need to be fixed.

Right now we don't have any of that. It's not clear at all what it is that the Government is trying to achieve in walking down this path, what problem they are trying to overcome.

This seems to me to have a lot more to do about the internal politics inside the Cabinet - of giving Peter Dutton a promotion, giving George Brandis a demotion - than it is about the national interest. But that's what we need to hear about.

Look, Labor's view has always been on national security that we have an instinct and a reflex of seeking to be bipartisan, so if there are good reasons for taking particular steps, we'll listen to them, but right now we are not hearing any of that.

HOST: George Brandis, the Attorney-General, last week on this program did mention that the AFP and Australia's intelligence agencies had managed to stop 12 terrorist attacks in Australia over the past four to five years, so it would sound like a fairly stellar record, not one that needs any particularly close attention and some sort of repair?

MARLES: Look, I think that is a fair point to make. We do have some of the best intelligence, law enforcement agencies in the world and they have done a really excellent job in protecting our country.

Obviously, given the events around the world this year and in the last few years and prior to that, we can't be complacent. There are increasing challenges to our national security. There are new threats that we have to face, and obviously any agency can - you can always be better.

Having said that, we do do a good job, and I haven't heard it expressed from the national security agencies themselves that they have a particular issue in terms of the coordination of the way in which they are going about their business.

So it comes back to the first point: we actually need to hear what is the problem which the Government is trying to fix.

HOST: The Prime Minister has announced today sweeping powers for defence forces to assist state police during any terror strike. Is that a welcome move?

MARLES: I think it is important that we make sure our laws keep pace with the challenges and the changes of threats that we face. In that sense, we are absolutely willing to have a good look at this.

There's a whole lot of measures which are being suggested today, such as liaison officers who are embedded in the civil police forces from the ADF, better training of the civil police forces from the ADF, pre-positioning of the ADF for potential domestic terrorism threats. That all makes sense to us.

We have obviously asked for a briefing in relation to this and we want to hear that, but our instinct is to come to these things with a bipartisan perspective.

In terms of the changes to the Defence Act itself to change the call-out provisions for the ADF, again, we want to see the actual legislation which the Government is seeking to put forward, but we have supported a raft of legislation previously which have sought to make our laws more robust in relation to national security-

HOST: -But in principle, you'd support-

MARLES: -and that's how we'll go about the process here.

HOST: But in principle, you'd support the notion of the military being somehow involved and supporting local police?

MARLES: Well, I think the objective here is to make sure that, in any crisis and in any moment, we bring to bear the most potent capability our nation has, be that in a civil police force or be it in the ADF.

We want to make sure that we have laws which are flexible enough to allow that to happen, whilst at the same time having laws which really promote the best coordination possible between all of those agencies.

We certainly support those principles and we look forward to working with the Government to try and achieve an outcome in relation to that.

Now, previously when we have worked on national security matters with the Government, we have often come up with ideas ourselves which have been incorporated into the end legislative product. I suspect we will see something like that process again, but we will work constructively with the Government in a bipartisan way to try and bring about an outcome here as well.

HOST: Richard Marles, you keep talking about wanting to approach these issues in a bipartisan manner, and then today, repeatedly and again tonight, you have talked about the previous issue we were just discussing as being about keeping Peter Dutton happy and ensuring him a promotion and Senator Brandis a demotion and so on. Explain for us where you are coming from with all that?

MARLES: Well, national security ought to be above politics. National security ought to be something that the major political parties can sit down together about, work through and come up with proposals for the benefit of our national interest and the Australian public.

HOST: Is this a bit of an annoyance that you haven't been consulted?

MARLES: Well, not necessarily, because we don't know what is being proposed, but certainly if there are measures proposed tomorrow, when there has been no discussion at all in relation to the question of a homeland security department and a homeland security portfolio, that would be a hopeless way of going about business.

That's not expressing an annoyance on the part of the Opposition - that's pointing out a way in which this Government has treated the Australian public with contempt, if that's actually how they go about things.

I mean, ultimately this should be the subject of a discussion, and what I'm trying to say is if the Government wants to have that discussion, we will sit down with them and do so in a constructive way, with a desire to achieve a bipartisan outcome. But if

what it actually is about is the internal politics of the Government, of the Cabinet, well, that's about that and not our national security-

HOST: -What makes you think it might be about that?

MARLES: -and that is not about- Well, I mean, you look at all that we have seen in relation to the way in which the Government has been going about its business across the whole spectrum of public policy: it is all about their internals. They are consumed with themselves and right now they are eating themselves.

When we look at this particular proposal in the past, firstly, it was about the aspirations of Scott Morrison, and in recent years we have seen it articulated in terms of the aspirations of Peter Dutton. That is not a reason to make a change of this kind.

If there is actually a substantive public policy reason to act here, then we are happy to sit down with the Government and talk it through. But in the absence of making the case and simply this being cast in terms of the ambitions of individuals, what other conclusion can we draw?

HOST: Richard Marles, thank you very much for your time.

MARLES: Thank you, Emma.

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