



**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
RADIO INTERVIEW
3AW DRIVE
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SUBJECTS: National security; Resignation of Greens' senators

HOST: Shadow Minister for Defence Richard Marles joins us. Hello, Mr Marles.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: How are you, Nick?

HOST: Do you have concern about this?

MARLES: Well, firstly the process that's been gone through here by the Government is completely hopeless. As you rightly said, the Prime Minister is lauding this as one of the biggest changes to the national security apparatus in 40 years, and yet it's essentially sprung on the Australian people today. There has been precisely zero discussion about the idea of a home affairs portfolio, a home affairs minister.

All we've had is leaks, be they intended or unintended, from the Government about all of this. I think what's most concerning is at no point have they articulated what the problem is that they're trying to fix. They haven't actually made out the case for why they are trying to do this.

It concerns me, Nick, that in the press conference this morning the Prime Minister was quite rightly asked whether the national security agencies themselves had recommended this and whether they supported this idea. In both cases the Prime Minister refused to answer that question. That doesn't leave me with a heap of confidence in respect of this, and ultimately we're left to basically conclude that is more about the political career of Peter Dutton and George Brandis than it is about our nation's security. You only need to look at the way poor old George was fighting back the tears in the way he went about the press conference to know that there was definitely a winner and definitely a loser today.

HOST: We'll talk about the politics of it in a second, but do you, in principle, have any problem with the home affairs? Now, assuming the Federal Police, ASIO, Border Force, think it's a good idea, do you have any problems with it?

MARLES: We don't that know that assumption is right. The answer to the question is, for the Labor point of view, we will be taking the briefings that I assume will be

offered to us by the Government to get a sense of what it is they're trying to do here, and actually interrogate this issue. The people we're really interested in hearing from are the national security agencies themselves so that we don't have to make assumptions about what their views are or are not. That's what's going to inform us about this.

HOST: It would make sense, though, wouldn't it, that if you put those agencies all under the same roof, effectively, or all in the same ministry, you would imagine it would be easier to coordinate, and coordination's really important in this day and age.

MARLES: Coordination is very important, but in the many briefings I've had from these agencies over many years they make it very plain that they coordinate extremely well right now, and so I guess the question I'm trying to answer in my own head is 'what difference does it make to have them reporting to one minister as opposed to another?'

Now, maybe there is a good reason for that, but we haven't heard it. We certainly didn't get it in the press conference today. That's what we would be looking for in the briefings that we get from the Government.

I would make this point, Nick, and want to make it really clearly: our attitude and our reflex, our instinct, when it comes to national security is always to act in a bipartisan way. Indeed, there has been a whole raft of legislation that we have supported around national security from opposition with this government since it's been in power. That's what we want to do, because national security should be above politics. Finding bipartisan consensus is always what we want to do in relation to these issues, and I was talking, for example, yesterday about the Defence call-out powers in those terms yesterday.

In relation to this, we just haven't heard any of the reasoning behind it. There is nothing, literally nothing, that has been provided to the Australian people about why this particular change is being made. If the Government can come up with the kind of clear, rational points – maybe some of the ones you're making – well, then we're happy to have that conversation, and if it's in our national interest of course we will be constructive about it.

Right now, this has the feel of it being far more about politics than our nation's security, and the Government really needs to stop acting in that way, about their own internals, and actually start talking about our national interest.

HOST: Are you concerned about the oversight, because it is really important, and this is where the Attorney-General had the power of oversight over ASIO, it was always envisaged that the Attorney-General, being a lawyer, and usually a very well-qualified lawyer, would have the wherewithal to oversee ASIO and to rein it back when it goes too far. Are you concerned about what will now be the oversight?

MARLES: I think the point you make there is a good one, and again they're very much questions that we want to ask and have answered. I do note that, I think, in the press conference today the Prime Minister talked about the role of the Attorney-

General now in relation to this, that ASIO warrants will still be done through the Attorney-General, but again all of that raises questions for us about if that's the case, then why the change?

There might be a good reason for this. It hasn't been made out, though. We haven't heard it.

I think ensuring that our national security apparatus does have appropriate oversight is really critical. It is important that our laws evolve and change to keep pace with the changing and, to be frank, growing threat to our nation, so we understand that and we're completely up for doing that, and our record in opposition demonstrates that. We have supported, as I said, a whole raft of legislation with the Government in relation to that.

As you walk down that path it's important that we're not fundamentally changing our way of life, because you do that and the terrorists win. It's not beyond the wit of all of us to find where that balance lies.

Again, if there are reasons, good, proper reasons in our national interest for walking down this path: happy to have the chat with government. We'll do that, and we'll work on that balance with them.

But right now, the Government has singularly failed to make out what the case here is for change. It really is quite different to the range of other announcements that have been made in the past in the national security stage.

HOST: And Mr Marles, the other thing that struck me is I was in Hobart at the last COAG meeting with all the premiers and the prime minister. Nothing happened during that particular COAG meeting with national security because the Prime Minister made a big deal about the *next* COAG meeting being all about national security – and then he turns around and makes the announcement yesterday and the announcement today, all about national security, without including the premiers.

MARLES: The thing is, if we're calling a spade a spade, the idea of building fiefdoms within this government has been around since Scott Morrison had a go at this a few years ago. Now, he ended up being shot down then by Julie Bishop and George Brandis in that fight. Then, Julie and George won.

We know their Cabinet is completely divided on this. We know that it's much more a soap opera about a kind of game of thrones as to who's building a bigger empire against who.

That's why you get a real sense of concern about how this has now come to a final announcement, and you only have to watch the press conference today and see the way Peter was smiling and the way George was, as I say, fighting back the tears to know who's won this particular encounter - but none of that has anything to do with our nation's security.

Now, I'm not ruling out the idea that there might be some good, rational reasons behind all this. We just want to hear them, and if there are we're up for the chat and

our form demonstrates this, but this has been, apart from anything else, handled appallingly by the Government to get to this announcement today.

HOST: And finally, Mr Marles, and briefly, the Labor Party checks, I'm assuming, every candidate for dual citizenship?

MARLES: We do, and I think this the difference between, if I can put it this way, professional parties of government and the fringe dwellers that we see with the Greens.

To be honest, I do have a sense of personal sympathy for both Scott Ludlam and Larissa Waters. This is obviously a pretty tragic moment in their careers, but it is astounding that something of this kind could have been missed. It says everything to me about what you've got when you're talking about the Greens political party on the one hand, who really are fringe dwellers, as compared to the professional major parties which are parties of government.

HOST: Thank you very much, Richard Marles, Shadow Minister for Defence.

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