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SUBJECTS: President Trump at the UN; North Korea; Australian navy exercises

HOST: Joining me now is the Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles, and let's start with the UN and President Trump criticised the UN for bloated bureaucracy; not the first to do that, Mr Marles, but then says, he's calling for bold reform so it can be a greater force for world peace, so it was quite constructive as well, much more than candidate Trump that's for sure.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well, I profoundly disagree with candidate Trump's view of the UN, it is a force for good in the world and I note that his language was significantly moderated so that's a good thing. And of course the UN can be more efficient and less bureaucratic, and it's important that it continues to work in that way, but anyone who's seen the operation of the UN around the world knows the remarkable job it does. And we do need to take a step back here and think about this more in terms glass half full than glass half empty, the world's attempts to come up with entities which provide some kind of decision making at a global basis have always been fraught with difficulty, I mean the League of Nations didn't work in anything like the way like the UN, and right now it does a remarkable job and it's getting better every year.

HOST: And as Julie Bishop pointed out there, if the UN didn't exist you'd have to come up with some other body, some other avenue to try and deal with those difficult, international, complex international issues.

MARLES: And that's right, and the task of trying to come up with a decision making mechanism for global affairs is actually a really hard problem to solve. So, I mean, the UN is easily the best attempt the world has had at this, and if you look at it and the bodies that work with it or sit under its umbrella, like the World Food Program, the World Health Organisation, the UNHCR, the International Labour Organisation, all of these bodies are doing incredible work. I mean, I've had the privilege, really, of seeing the operation of refugee camps in the Middle East, in Africa, and the work of the UN and its agencies there is truly remarkable and it's saving lives each and every day. The UN has an incredibly important role to play and I'm much more in the camp of celebrating that rather than criticising it. Acknowledging that of course all of these entities can be more efficient, they do need to be less bureaucratic, there's an

ongoing challenge in relation to that, so yes, President Trump is right, but there should be more celebration of what the UN does and it is good that his tone has been modulated to a large degree, but I'd like to hear the celebration side of this answer.

HOST: While there's some doubt as to the true commitment of say China and Russia when it comes to reining in Pyongyang, at least the UN Security Council has been of one voice in recent weeks in terms of its condemnation of Pyongyang's pursuit of a greater nuclear capacity. But nothing seems to be reining in that dictator right now, more strong rhetoric out of Pyongyang overnight. Rather than the sanctions working to rein him in, it's going to expedite their push for greater nuclear capacity.

MARLES: Well I think we've got to give the sanctions a little bit of time to work, I mean, it's only been a couple of weeks that they have actually been in effect and we've seen, as you rightly say, two UN Security Council meetings which have put in place sanctions, the last putting in place a greater set of sanctions than the first. And so, it is good that we are seeing concerted global effort which involves both China and Russia as a part of it, and I think this is the path that we need to proceed down. And I do think there's a long way to go in terms of peaceful means that can be pursued in terms of trying to shape North Korea's behaviour and if it's done with willingness and commitment on the part of all nations, but very much including China in this as well, then I still have hope that we can shape North Korea's actions in the way that we'd want to.

HOST: How do you see this, the end game for Kim Jong-un, obviously a very hard thing to predict, but what he's trying to do here? Is it all about leverage and trying to get a better position when there is finally some sort of negotiation that is undertaken with North Korea – is that what this is all about? Because the increasingly provocative behaviour just seems to be so risky right now.

MARLES: I think we can tie ourselves in knots in terms of trying to understand the exact motive of Kim Jong-un in all of this. I suspect this is about trying to protect his own regime principally, but at the end of the day he is acting against what are the international, against international law, in trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and I think the real point for the international community is this; that if it becomes an accepted fact that North Korea has a nuclear capability, and particularly one that it can fit to intercontinental ballistic missiles, that is a very dangerous moment for the world because it puts intolerable pressure on other countries within the region in East Asia, countries like Japan, South Korea or Vietnam, to move down a nuclear path. And the cause of non-proliferation, which really has been going well since the end of the Cold War, is suddenly turned on its head, so it is important that we do everything we can to stop it being an accepted fact that North Korea have this nuclear capability. And it's why it is so important that we are acting as one as an international community – and when I say that – acting in concert with both China and Russia in trying to make sure that this does not become an accepted fact, because much turns on it.

HOST: Now, finally, this naval exercise in the Indo-Pacific region, that The Daily Telegraph reports on this morning, what do you make of this? Do you welcome this

initiative by the Royal Australian Navy and just how close should they go to the contested waters and territories of the South China Sea here?

MARLES: Well I don't know, Kieran, the details of what is involved in this exercise. I know that the Navy engages in exercises frequently and it's important that they do that so that their skills are at the best level that they can be at. And in relation to the South China Sea, the answer to that question is that whatever they are intending to do they should do within the full scope of what the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea allows in the South China Sea. We should be acting with the rights that we have under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as China does. And as, in fact, China did recently when Australia was engaging with the US in Exercise Talisman Sabre and there was a Chinese naval vessel not far from those exercises, which was within its rights to be there. So we need to be exercising our rights to the fullest extent as they exist within the South China Sea and that's – whatever this navy exercise is intended to do, it should do with that in mind.

HOST: Mr Marles, I appreciate your time and we're out of time this morning. Talk to you soon.

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