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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
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SUBJECT/S: North Korea, Trump, Pacific Command, Admiral Harris.

KIERAN GILBERT: Live to Washington the Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles. On to that specific question in a moment. First though you've been holding talks Mr Marles with members of the Armed Services Committee also at the Pentagon. How serious is the military option being treated there?

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well certainly the issue of North Korea is dominating thinking here, as you would expect. I would say though that there is a very clear sense of what a military option would represent. It's been pointed out to me at the Pentagon what Secretary Mattis has said previously that a conflict with North Korea would see a war on a scale that has been unprecedented within our lifetime. So you know this is not the first option where people's heads are focused. At least in their conversations with me and it makes sense has been to focus on all peaceful means and that means diplomatic options but also pursuing a regime of sanctions and seeking to engage China in doing that.

GILBERT: That's your view is the universal view across the establishment in the various military figures that you've been talking to?

MARLES: Oh yeah. There is absolutely no doubt in people's minds here how serious and catastrophic a military option would be and there was very sensible and sober reflection on that in all the conversations that I've had. And what is really being talked about is a campaign of pressure on North Korea through diplomatic means through sanctions by engaging with China to try and do what can be done to shape behavior. But there is also a very clear sense that we can't accept fact that North Korea becomes a nuclear power would be a very detrimental situation in terms of East Asian security but global security. It would put an unbearable pressure on countries like Japan, South Korea in terms of proliferation. So you know this cannot become an accepted fact.

GILBERT: Well you said you met with the members of the Armed Services Committee as well members of Congress. Is there a fear though, while that's the aim to have a diplomatic course that this President is unpredictable. Is there a fear that they don't know how he is going to react yet?

MARLES: Well look I think you know a consistent message has been to look at American action and conduct in terms of what's been happening here and in that sense a harder edge has been placed in respect of North Korea and it's right that we have seen a galvanizing of international action through the UN Security Council and people point to the fact that China is doing more in terms of its regime of sanctions as well. And so I think their people are very focused on what the outcomes are and American action is here. Now Kieran you know I'm no fan of diplomacy by tweet and you know I think it is important that there is predictability in the way in which international relations is conducted. But a clear message that I've been getting is for us to focus on what the action and the outcomes have been. And they have been in the right direction.

GILBERT: But now in terms of this specific story that we've been reporting at length today that the North Korean hackers have obtained some highly classified material from the south including possible plans for assassination of Kim Jong Un that you're worried that that might be a tipping point for that rogue dictator.

MARLES: Well I don't I don't think we should be talking in terms of tipping points. But obviously if this turns out to be true it's concerning, I mean and concerning at a number of levels. I mean it's concerning that North Korea would get its hands on this information but it's also a demonstration of if it turns out to be true North Korean capability in terms of its cyber attacks and it makes very clear North Korea's intent. And it's a further example of why we do need to be shaping or attempting to shape and change the behavior of North Korea. But it's certainly a very bad development if this story turns out to be true.

GILBERT: One of the things that has been debated since Donald Trump won that election was inaugurated and took control of the Oval Office has been in Australia's view on the alliance and questions as to whether or not we should be rethinking our dependence on the UN and US strategic relationships. Certainly the view of Paul Keating and Bob Carr and others saying that we need to rethink the way that we deal with the United States. What's the view from there in terms of Australia is there a reassurance that you've received in terms of commitment to the two ties and the ANZUS alliance.

MARLES: Look there is a reassurance and there is a very clear message that everyone I've spoken to has been keen to give and that is ongoing American intent to pursue the alliance and an ongoing American commitment to Australia and I think that that is borne out in a sense if you like through what we've seen as the American reaction to that original phone call between the President and the Prime Minister earlier this year I mean we have seen a Vice Presidential visit to Australia. We saw the visit of Senator John McCain and AUSMIN meeting where there was a round of diplomatic events associated with that so that there has been a very significant outpouring really of friendship and affection from the American side towards Australia and seeking to reassure us about the importance that America places upon our alliance. But alliances more generally and what Americans will point out is that their system of alliances really they see as one of their assets it's a competitive advantage if you like in terms of global affairs and something that really needs to be maintained and nurtured. So all of those messages have been received. I think it is fair to say there's also been some curiosity on their part about how it's all been received in in Australia and you know for my part I've been making clear that whilst I think it has created a discussion about the alliance in Australia they're in doing that. Looking at first principles the alliance is as relevant to Australia today.

GILBERT: So you've been looking to reassure U.S. officials and congressmen and women that that under a Labor government that the Australian position on the alliance would remain strong despite the contributions of elder statesmen like Paul Keating and Bob Carr within your party. Is that part of your effort there right now?

MARLES: Well look I wouldn't want to say that the people here have been particularly focused on the views of Paul Keating and Bob Carr. I think there is a more general curiosity about how President Trump has been received in Australia and for sure I am very keen to make it clear that from the point of view of Labor and the Opposition firstly it is a bipartisan commitment to the alliance within the Australian polity. But also that we see the alliance as highly relevant to Australia today as a very important part of our national security framework going forward and as relevant today as it's ever been and I think that an important message to convey to our American counterparts and I do think that that is well received.

GILBERT: What on earth though is going on with the Trump White House and the administration more broadly. Now Donald Trump suggesting that maybe he and his secretary of state should have an IQ test and compare the results. It's all a bit odd.

MARLES: Well look I think that far be it for me to comment on of the relationship between the American President and his Secretary of State. I mean obviously it is dominating the news here and so it's hard not to see discussion of this when you turn on American TV and you're in your hotel room. But look I think where we get to here is Donald Trump is pursuing politics in a way that's different to how we've ever seen it done before and we all know that. And there's a process of getting used to that and in all the discussions that I've been having at different levels I think everyone is coming to terms with how the world operates in the context of the way this particular President does business. But people are finding a way and I think you see that in the way the government functions here in Washington and I think you can see that in the way in which we as a country are relating to the US in this context -

GILBERT: But some Republicans aren't finding a way to get this call the respected run one respected senator chair of the Foreign Relations Committee saying it's like a day care center.

MARLES: Well look at it. What I think is clear is that they're governing this country or from our point of view maintaining our relationship and building our relationship over the next few years with the United States. We can find a way and it's a very deep relationship which exists at a whole range of levels a very close military to military relationship for example. And you get back to the fundamental point. Is this a relationship that is important to Australia? Obviously it is. And in that context we move forward and really you definitely get that sense as well as a sense that there is a deep affection here in America for Australia as I believe there is cause Australia for America. And so you know I think the alliance is strong.

GILBERT: Well it might be but I'm not sure the perception of the President has widespread support across the electorate. But let's move on to the Pacific Command in Hawaii. You're going to be meeting with Admiral Harris the Pacific Command the Admiral in charge of the Pacific Command, based in Hawaii. There is talk, Peter Hartcher reporting again that he is the favorite to be the next ambassador to Australia. This is an appointment that won't go down well with the Chinese admiral Harris as a hawk when it comes to the South China Sea.

MARLES: Well look let let's see how all this plays out. But Admiral Harris is a great friend of Australia. I'm certainly looking forward to meeting him on Friday. You know

he is a very serious and sophisticated man. If it turns out that he ends up in Canberra that I think would be a fantastic result. But you know who knows what plays out here. I mean from my point of view I'm very keen to get his sense of how things are playing particularly in respect of North Korea. I think he does a fantastic job at Pacific Command and you do get a really, I know you've had this experience as well. You get it you get a very textured and in-depth sense of the American view and analysis of East Asia and in this context North Korea from the perspective of the Pacific Command in Honolulu. I think Admiral Harris has done a fantastic job in this role. Let let's see what the future holds.

GILBERT: Richard Marles Shadow Defence Minister, live from Washington thanks for your time this morning.

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