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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TV INTERVIEW  
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SPEERS  
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***SUBJECTS: Foreign Affairs White Paper***

**HOST:** Richard Marles, thanks for your time. Now, often Ministers, Shadow Ministers, are asked about choosing between the US and China. They say we don't need to choose between the two. This White Paper, though, seems to emphasise that we do have some fears for the region if it were to be dominated by China in the future.

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** Well, I think the White Paper is a pretty useful document in terms of its assessment of the geopolitical forces within our region. I mean, there are some issues that are a little rich, in the sense of talking about the impact of climate change, which obviously there will be such an impact but on that basis where this government is going on climate change flies in the face of that, and obviously development assistance is critically important, as the White Paper points out, and yet this government has cut funding to it. As an assessment of the sort of geopolitical forces that we face I think it is a useful document.

Our alliance partner is very clear. We have been in alliance for a very long period with the United States. I think it's as relevant today as it's ever been. I think there has been something of a re-assessment of the alliance since the election of Donald Trump, but I think that has come out in saying that the alliance is as relevant today as it's ever been, and that's because we do share values, and one of those is about establishing or seeking to establish a rules-based global order which we seek to participate with the United States in achieving.

A rise of China is something to be welcomed, but we welcome it on terms where China participates and contributes that rules-based order, and obviously there have been some anxieties about that.

**HOST:** Some big ones, and on that rise of China in relation to Donald Trump, there's been a lot of consternation, guessing, about to what extent the US will continue to

have a big presence within the Asia-Pacific region, but at the same time when you look at one of the graphs within this White Paper it suggests China's economy could be almost twice as big as the US, or not far off it, by 2030. If they're not going to be the dominant force they might not be far off.

**MARLES:** A few things come from that. Firstly, the rise of China in an economic sense has been of enormous benefit to Australia, and we need to acknowledge that. There's a legitimacy about China seeking as a result to play a part in the world bigger than it has in the past, and I think we all acknowledge that and indeed welcome it, but what we want to see is China playing that part in a rules-based global order which has been part of the pre-conditions that have allowed them to experience the development and increase in prosperity that they have, and the White Paper points that out as well.

I think in terms of the United States, whilst a lot of people ask a question about whether it not there is some form of American retreat going on over a period of time, I actually think that is premature. I reckon we will see an increase in the American defence footprint, for example, in East Asia during this term of government, this term of American government, and so I think America is going to be a player in East Asia for a long time to come, and that is obviously in our interest.

**HOST:** Alright, there's a lot of talk, always, about China, the rules-based order. Are they doing that right now?

**MARLES:** You can't avoid what we've seen in the South China Sea, and clearly we've have anxieties about that, and we should. What China has done in the South China Sea, according to the Court of Arbitration, is actions that are inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Now, that rules-based order embodied in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is fundamental to Australia's national interest. By some measures most of our trade goes through the South China Sea. Freedom of Navigation in that sense, as we understand it under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, goes to the heart of Australia's prosperity and we need to know that those rules of the road are going to continue into the future, and so the actions that we've seen by China in the South China Sea are an obvious concern, and I think it is right to point that concern out.

**HOST:** And not just a concern. Is it fair to say that so far on that element, this is a big area, they've been able to choose which path they would have taken, urged very strongly by the US not to go down that path of militarisation. They did, so is it fair to say bluntly they were not following the rules-based order, there?

**MARLES:** Their actions, as found by the Court of Arbitration, are inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and I've long been a person who said that decision has meaning, and that our national interest is in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea applying throughout the oceans of the world and in the South China Sea, also, and it's really important that as a country we assert that and we assert it very clearly.

**HOST:** Would you have done anything differently on that matter if you were Defence Minister through that time?

**MARLES:** It's hard to make an assessment of that without being in the chair, if we're being honest. You do need to have at your disposal all the conversations that you'd been having with the various countries in play and in opposition you don't see that, so it is hard to make that assessment.

I think, though, from a principled point of view, it is really essential that we are clear about what our national interests are. They are not about the various disputes of the sovereignty which are going on within the South China Sea, but what they very are, clearly, is about the rules which are contained in the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, which provide freedom of navigation – the freedom of navigation we rely upon in terms of our trade. That's what we need to be asserting and that's what we need to be asserting very, very clearly.

**HOST:** So, should that have been asserted, though, more strongly, more often, in the past?

**MARLES:** As I say, it is hard to make that judgement sitting as I am in opposition, but what I absolutely know is that that is our national interest. That's what needs to be asserted very clearly, and I might also make the point that all of that transcends the party politics of any given moment in time and should never become subjugated to the party politics within our country or indeed the sort of politics that might exist elsewhere.

This goes to the core of our national interest, and we need to be very, very clear in asserting what our national interest is and making those messages clear to everybody involved in the region and the world.

**HOST:** What about the politics at the end of Penny Wong's response yesterday? She gave her opening remarks in regards to the Foreign Policy White Paper. She then said 'Regrettably, I do not believe that this divided government is capable of advocating and prosecuting those interests efficiently.' Now, what about the division during the Gillard Government in launching the Asian Century White Paper? Were you capable of similarly efficient prosecution?

**MARLES:** You can't argue that there is an issue at large about the effective prosecution of government by the Coalition right now. I mean, the cancelling of a week of parliament, which we've seen, is the strongest evidence of that.

I actually think the Asian Century White Paper was a really important contribution, and unlike the Coalition we're not going to be petty and mean about what we've seen in terms of the White Paper today. I think it is a useful document. It is a good assessment of the geopolitical forces that we experience in the region, and we're not about to throw all of that in the bin, but that's exactly what the Coalition did in relation to the Asian Century White Paper, and it was a really important articulation of how Australia can act in a way that gains for us the most benefit of what was then and what continues to be the single biggest social phenomenon in the world today, and that's the rising middle class in Asia – in China, but in countries like Indonesia as well and in countries like India. Have a very thoughtful approach to how we can best

deal with that is completely critical, and there is much in the Asian Century paper that is useful to this day.

**HOST:** Sure, but if you're judging a government on its division when they hand down one of these big, important long-thinking plans, what does that say about Labor in its late days under Julia Gillard or even Kevin Rudd?

**MARLES:** I'm happy for the Asian Century White Paper to be judged on the basis of its content, and its content was highly relevant then and remains highly relevant now, and it shouldn't have been thrown in the-

**HOST:** -OK, but today then, shouldn't this be judged on its content?

**MARLES:** Sure, and we are, and that's why Penny Wong's made clear and I'm making clear now that this is a useful assessment of the geopolitical forces that we face in East Asia today, and I guess as far as this document goes I think it is a contribution.

We pointed out that there are elements in it, as I said earlier, that are a bit rich in respect of climate change and development assistance, given the path that this government's obviously taken, but to put that one side the bigger picture assessment of the world that we face is a useful assessment, and as far as the document goes in that respect it's a useful contribution and we're not about to ditch it.

**HOST:** Alright, back to the content, because there's talk within this of a hope that the US and China can get more on the same page in trade, maybe a big trade deal, then they'll be able to see eye-to-eye better on security. Given what we've seen of Donald Trump expressly saying no multilateral trade deals - they're bad, he says - is there any hope that's going to happen?

**MARLES:** Well, in the short term obviously it's hard to be anything other than pessimistic, and I think it is very regrettable the TPP has gone the way it went. Donald Trump made that decision. I'd point out it was probably going to be the policy of a Clinton administration as well, so it ended up where America was, and I think the TPP had a very important role to play in economic terms in East Asia. It had an important role to play strategically, I think, as well, so it is disappointing that that's not now proceeding with America and obviously now Canada as a part of it. I think we do need to be- it is certainly in Australia's interest that we have an economically open and engaged United States participating in our region.

I guess this takes us then to another point, that it is very important within the context of our alliance with the United States, which I profoundly support, that we use our voice, and part of the use of our voice needs to be articulating for an open, trading America, particularly in our region.

**HOST:** Just finally, we're the only country, of course, not with a 90 days' fuel supply that the IEA requires, the only country that is a member of that. Would you support or be open to at all the call from John Blackburn for a two cent levy on Australian fuel to get us up to that 90 days' supply, given the current tensions in the South China Sea?

**MARLES:** Well, look, I think the 90 days of supply is an important issue. The mechanism by which we get there is something that needs to be thought through very carefully, but I do think that we have to be very mindful of our security settings and that is a critical part of it.

I would note that the White Paper does place an important emphasis on defence and security going forward and the need for Australia to be more self-reliant. We agree with that, which is why we support the pathway to two per cent of GDP spend in respect of defence. I think the 90-day issue is a critical issue, but the exact way we get there needs to be thought through very carefully.

**HOST:** Richard Marles, thanks for your time today.

**MARLES:** Thanks, Tom.