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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
SKY NEWS – SPEERS ON SUNDAY  
SUNDAY, 18 FEBURARY 2018**

***SUBJECT/S: Crisis in the Government; PM's Washington D.C visit; US  
Defence Strategy***

**DAVID SPEERS:** First though to our main guest this morning, the Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles, who joins us to discuss the political crisis facing the Government and the Prime Minister's visit to Washington later this week. Richard Marles, thank you very much for your time. Let's start on Barnaby Joyce. Labor has been saying for most of this week that Barnaby Joyce should resign, so far he's refusing to do so, what is the specific reason why you think he is no longer fit to be a Minister?

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** Well I think there are a whole lot of questions that have failed to be answered properly about Barnaby's relationship with the Ministerial Code of Conduct, it would appear in many instances that may well have been broken. We've clearly now got a totally dysfunctional state of affairs at the very top of this Government. It would seem to me Barnaby has to go, but I know one thing, one of them has to. The idea that you've got number one and number two fighting with each other so overtly is unprecedented. I mean I genuinely - there is no record of a sitting Prime Minister and a sitting Deputy Prime Minister showing such open contempt for each other and so long as that persists we're not being governed and critical issues are not being dealt with.

**SPEERS:** And look, that's absolutely a fair political judgement, but specifically on the breach, you're saying that the Code of Conduct, the Ministerial Code, has been breached. Is that why you believe he should go?

**MARLES:** Well that's the principal reason, and we've asked a whole lot of questions -

**SPEERS:** And how has it been breached?

**MARLES:** Well there are questions in respect of the employment of Barnaby's now partner, the reason why she left Barnaby's employment and the terms on which she

started working with Matt Canavan. Now questions have been asked in relation to that, they haven't been adequately answered, and there hasn't really been an attempt to do that, and I think in those circumstances we're entitled to take an inference that the Code of Conduct has been breached. But listen David, I think that they are all questions that I expect you in the media would want to have a real crack at Barnaby about and try to get to the bottom of, but so far you've not had the opportunity to do that, and I think that's why he's going on leave next week to make sure that what would be an appalling press conference is avoided.

**SPEERS:** The Ministerial Code will be toughened, as the Prime Minister has now announced, would Labor in Government repeal a ban on Ministers having sexual relations with staff members?

**MARLES:** Ok, well, Labor has been the Party for decades which has been the greatest advocate for women's participation in the workforce. Going back to Whitlam and since we have been the biggest advocates for the equal participation of women in the workforce, and a key part of that is to make sure that women are participating in the workforce free of harassment and free from unwanted advances. Now, whatever is world's best practice, really, in relation to those policies is what should apply to the Ministerial Code of Conduct and, indeed, should apply to the way in which Parliamentarians maintain their own offices. We are completely up for a discussion about ensuring that world's best practice is what applies here, but in terms of what the Prime Minister announced on Thursday, they were hand written notes, put together in five minutes in order to get the Prime Minister through a very difficult press conference. That's not the basis for a proper policy. We'll sit down and have that conversation and that should be done, but right now that is about - well it's about distracting from the fact that they have a crisis at the top of their Government.

**SPEERS:** Ok, the Code was discussed through the week with senior Ministers, but you're saying you're open to this new ban that he's announced for Ministers, in principle - I mean, just cutting to the chase, in principle should Ministers be having sex with staff members?

**MARLES:** Look, I think - in principle we should have workplaces that enable women to participate fully, free from harassment and free from unwanted advances. That's the principle that we should -

**SPEERS:** Sure, but this isn't a difficult question to answer, Richard Marles, in principle should a Minister in a position of power in a relatively small office be engaging in that sort of relationship with a staff member?

**MARLES:** Well, I don't think so, but in terms of - but rather than doing these procedures on the run, I think what should be happening here is a proper discussion should be put in place to make sure that we get the best policies, world's best practice policies, applying in the Ministerial Code of Conduct. And that's the process that should be gone through here. What we've got is the Prime Minister having some hand written notes to try and get himself through a difficult press conference, in order to distract from the fact that at the very top of this Government there is an unprecedented conflict and one which is totally distracting this Government's ability for working for everyday Australians, and so this is a bit of a smoke screen David.

**SPEERS:** Ok, but you agree - just to finish off on this point - you do agree that it's not appropriate for Ministers to do that. Labor of course never had such a ban in place, there were issues when Labor was in Government, so you do agree at least, in principle, that this is something that needs to stop?

**MARLES:** Well, it's - I don't like it, but I think what should be the appropriate policies that are put in place ought to be the subject of a proper discussion, and not done in a knee jerk reaction to provide a smoke screen against the fact that there's a crisis at the top of the Government. And that's what's going on here. And the principle, the ultimate principle here, is to make sure that we have workplaces that are free of harassment and unwanted advances. Now, we're in a complicated area obviously, and it behooves a proper conversation and a lot of consideration, not the sort of knee jerk reaction that we've seen on the part of the Prime Minister here. But that is because he is trying to put in place a smoke screen to distract from what's actually going on here. This is Government in crisis and so long as it is, we're not being governed.

**SPEERS:** You seemed to suggest yesterday, Richard Marles, it was untenable for the Prime Minister to proceed with his visit to the United States while ever this crisis, as you call it, is unresolved back home. Are you really saying that unless Barnaby Joyce quits, or is forced out by his Party, that Malcolm Turnbull should what, phone President Trump and say "I can't come"?

**MARLES:** Well, all I know is that I can't see a bigger issue facing this Government right now than the fact that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister are in open conflict with each other. And the meeting yesterday doesn't give me much comfort in terms of the back and forth that you should at the top of this show. I mean it is absolutely unprecedented, really since Federation -

**SPEERS:** So should he call off the trip to Washington?

**MARLES:** Look, I think that - and this is what I said yesterday, I think a real leader, I think John Howard would step up in this situation, sort out this mess and move on. That's what Malcolm Turnbull actually needs to do.

**SPEERS:** They did meet late yesterday and said that they'll work together, that their relationship's ok, is that not enough? What needs to happen for him still to be able to go in confidence to Washington this week?

**MARLES:** Well, I'm about as convinced by that meeting as you are. I mean I don't think anyone who has watched the last few days could possibly imagine that a meeting of that kind suddenly means that they're the best of mates. And if it was possible -

**SPEERS:** So he shouldn't go to Washington?

**MARLES:** What he needs to do is sort this mess out. And what I find hard to imagine is how he's going to be representing us overseas in circumstances where there is this crisis going on here. I mean, no amount of going overseas, no amount of Barnaby taking leave, no amount of going into hiding, is going to resolve the fact

that we have a crisis at the very top of our Government, and so long as that crisis persists we're not being governed. I mean all the critical issues are not being thought through. And you mentioned it in terms of the Murray Darling Basin, I mean this meeting in Washington is an absolutely crucial meeting and it's being overshadowed by this, not to mention all the other issues which are facing the Australian people. I mean I think ordinary Australians can rightly feel that the Coalition, such as it exists at the moment, has completely abandoned them.

**SPEERS:** Let's turn to this visit to Washington, should it go ahead, and we certainly haven't had any indication that it will be called off. The new US Defense Strategy, you would think, is going to be a key talking point. It was published last month, it names China and Russia as "revisionist powers" that are "the central challenge to US prosperity and security". It did spark immediate criticism from China, what should Malcolm Turnbull's message to Donald Trump be about this new Defense Strategy?

**MARLES:** Well, the first thing the Government needs to do is clean itself up in relation to its view on this. I mean in the aftermath of this Strategy being released we had one view from the Defence Minister, another from the Foreign Minister and another again from the Deputy Prime Minister. This is not an unimportant document, it's the defence strategy of our major national security ally, our Alliance partner, you would hope that the Government speaks with one voice. So, the first thing that Malcolm Turnbull needs to do is use this visit as a means by which he actually clarifies Australia's position in respect of it and that's absolutely critical.

**SPEERS:** And what should that position be from your perspective?

**MARLES:** Well, look, from our perspective, I actually think this is a useful document, I wouldn't agree with every sentence in it. I don't think that, for example, China seeks to export an ideology and I don't think we face a military threat from China. But I do think that it is right to be thinking about state actors in the way in which this paper describes. I mean since 2001, September 11, our world did change and rightly since then we've been very focussed on global terrorism as a major threat and that hasn't gone away and will be a part of our world going forward, but nor have state actors disappeared in that time as well. And you only need to look at what's going on with North Korea in our region to be clear that state actors remain a critical issue for us and I think that -

**SPEERS:** Well is China in your view, is China a revisionist power?

**MARLES:** Well, I don't think, I don't think China is seeking to export an ideology, I don't think China is the Soviet Union. And I think the rise of China is something that fundamentally we should embrace. That said, China is clearly seeking to assert itself in a way that we have not seen previously and that presents challenges, and the global rules based order -

**SPEERS:** Do you think - let me put another description to you, do you think China is trying to undermine the international rules based order?

**MARLES:** I think it's certainly trying to influence it and we have -

**SPEERS:** And undermine it?

**MARLES:** Well, I think if you look at the South China Sea and what's being happening there, actions that China have taken have been found to be in contravention of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, so that's obviously a place in which they are seeking to change that order. And the point here is to understand our interests and our interest has been underpinned by a stable, global rules based order, and again if you look at the South China Sea specifically, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, part of that rules based order, is the basis upon which we are able to have most of our trade pass through, in peace, the South China Sea. This goes to the heart of our interests and we're heavily invested in this, and so there are challenges in terms of the way China behaves.

**SPEERS:** These were the words, about China undermining the rules based order, these were the words from the new, incoming US Ambassador to Australia, Harry Harris, he said this during the week in Washington. Look Admiral Harris is one of the most highly regarded and accomplished Ambassadors to US has sent to Australia. He's also one of the most hawkish on China though, as you well know, Richard Marles, he does strong views also about the role Australia needs to be playing when it comes to the South China Sea. Do you expect he will ask Australia to actually take part in freedom of navigation exercises?

**MARLES:** Well, I think he'll be the Ambassador and that request will, if there is such a request, I'm sure firstly will be done behind closed doors and will be done through the normal channels. I think Harry Harris is going to be a fantastic Ambassador and I think it's a great appointment, he's the most serious person really to have ever been appointed to this role, and he therefore comes highly credentialed. I've met with Admiral Harris a number of times, I think he has a very realistic view in respect of China, but I think the other important point here is, to the extent that there is an argument out there about America's ongoing role in the world, and there are many analysts who will describe America as being in retreat, having somebody as serious as Admiral Harris in Canberra, and seeing the world from the perspective of Canberra, I think is really important "intel" if you like to have fed back into the American system. So, at a whole range of levels I think it's going to be a great thing that Admiral Harris is the Ambassador to Australia.

**SPEERS:** Whether or not they ask, or he asks, Australia to take part in these operations themselves, the other thing that may come, some suggest, is the US may want to actually conduct its own freedom of navigation exercises with ships departing from Darwin. Would you have any problem with that, or would you worry about the message that might send to Beijing?

**MARLES:** Look I've made my views on the South China Sea clear, I think it is very important that Australia asserts the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea underpins our national interest within the South China Sea and at the heart of that is freedom of navigation. So, and I've said on many occasions, in principle I think all options need to be on the table in order to assert the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Now, we don't take a view, and we shouldn't take a view, about the various sovereignty disputes which go on within the South China Sea, but freedom of navigation is fundamental to us.

**SPEERS:** I appreciate that, but specifically US ships leaving the Port of Darwin to conduct these operations, you wouldn't have a problem with that then?

**MARLES:** Well, I've made it clear that I think in principle we ought to be a party to whatever asserts the rights of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea. It is difficult, really David, from Opposition to go into the specifics of whether a particular operation is a good idea or not. I mean you really do need to have all the information in front of you which you don't have when you're in Opposition, so to the extent that I'm sort of hedging in answering that question, that's the reason why. But at a principled level, it is really important that we are asserting the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea because that goes to the heart of our national interest.

**SPEERS:** Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles, we will have to leave it there, thanks so much for joining us this morning.

**MARLES:** Pleasure. Thanks David.

**ENDS**