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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
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***SUBJECT/S: North Korea; US foreign policy; Labor's anti-dumping plan;
Labor's plan to restore education funding***

HOST: Well, as the world wonders what the meeting between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un will bring, at home attention is turning to what that might mean for Australia. For more on this and other political news of the week, we're speaking with Richard Marles, Shadow Defence Minister. Richard Marles, welcome.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW DEFENCE MINISTER: Thanks, Andrew. Good to be here.

HOST: So, how much faith do you have that these planned talks will be both meaningful and productive?

MARLES: Well it's big news and it's hard to answer that question, I think, because the North Korean regime and our view of them is so opaque that it is difficult to work out the motivation at the North Korea end for doing this. It's obviously better that people are talking than fighting. That's clearly the case, and the prospect of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula is a fantastic prospect. The world would be a much safer place for that to occur.

So, it's hard not to feel hope in these moments, but you know we've got to have our fingers crossed that this isn't false hope, and it's very important that bad behavior is not rewarded on the part of North Korea. Now, if it is sanctions which are bringing North Korea to the table I feel more comfortable about that. I think the other point to make here, and again I take some heart from some of the news that's broken overnight, China needs to be engaged in all of this. We've been wanting them to be more involved in the process and they've become more involved and that's been a key part of the diplomacy over the last year. It's really important that an event of this kind doesn't marginalize China. The fact that there's been contact between the US and China overnight gives me comfort that China is going to be engaged and invested in this in this process as well, and I think that's very important.

HOST: You said there that perhaps the motivation from North Korea is unclear as to why they're motivated to stage these talks, but at the same time you did mention sanctions there. Do you feel as though perhaps this is the key, that those sanctions have been very effective and the North Koreans have had to approach the United States?

MARLES: Well there's no doubt that the sanctions have been effective and they are very significant and, you know, I was saying last year, as the Government here was saying last year, that we need to give time for those sanctions to bite, and I think they have bitten and that's really important. To that end it's really critical that the campaign of maximum pressure through these sanctions is maintained and that there's no letting up on that, because if anything's going to change North Korean behavior is that. So, if this is the reason why we are at the point that we're at now, and that's how the administration in the United States characterizing it, well, that's obviously good.

When you walk down the path of having a dialogue with any country you begin the process of building a partnership, and there has to be a question about the reliability of North Korea as a partner in any sense, and I think that's where there is justifiable anxiety about how this will all play out. But, you know, they are potentially issues which can be managed, and of course there'll be information which is in the hands of the American administration that we'll never see that will be informing them, and let's hope that gives them a sense that something can be gained from this.

HOST: How much credit do you give President Donald Trump for making this happen, and at the same time I reference you to comments made by former Prime Minister Paul Keating over the past 24 hours. His assessment is that Donald Trump, his foreign policy is pragmatic. He's giving him credit where perhaps other American leaders have failed.

MARLES: Well, I think there is some appropriateness in giving credit to the Trump administration in a range of areas in respect of foreign policy. Not across the board, I might add. What has been happening in a trade sense I would be highly critical of him, and we might talk about that in a moment, but I do think that there is a sense in which America is more present in the world; when lines are being drawn they have been given meaning and that's important.

In relation to North Korea specifically, taking a harder edge to North Korea I think was an important step to take, whilst at the same time seeking to engage more and ask more from China and indeed receiving more from China. China has stepped up in the last 12 months. That's been important. So all of those have been significant moves in the way in which the Trump administration have handled this issue and I think they have been positive moves.

HOST: But would you say perhaps that Donald Trump's policy has been one of brinkmanship, which is of course risky, but that may be paying dividends.

MARLES: Well, look, I think having a harder edge and seeking to engage China are the fundamentals of the policy which, if it is yielding positive outcomes, is the reason why.

I've never been a fan of diplomacy by tweet. It's also important to note though that if we're talking about brinkmanship that has very much been coming from the side of the North Koreans. It is the program of nuclearisation that North Korea is going through which is what has driven this, more than tweets or anything else in relation to the international community. We shouldn't take our eyes off that.

I think the fundamentals here are seeking to have a harder edge, making a point that strategic patience is not where this is now going, and at the same time engaging China, and it is to the credit of the Trump administration that they've walked down that path.

HOST: And just briefly, you mentioned our eyes are on the North Korean situation as it should be in this region, but do you feel as though perhaps in the background we've heard sabre rattling from Russia recently? Should the world be concerned about that?

MARLES: Sure. I think Russia is a significant player, and what we're seeing there I think is of concern and if we were living in Europe we would be very focused on Russia, but even sitting where we are here in the East Asian time zone, in the Pacific, I think we are seeing Russia spreading its wings in our part of the world also. They are a Pacific nation and they have significant ports, Vladivostok in the North Pacific, and we're feeling their presence more and I think all of that is a factor here as well.

HOST: And let's turn to that issue of tariffs you mentioned earlier. Certainly your leader Bill Shorten is concerned. He says that decision to increase tariffs raises the risk that steel could be dumped here. What is what do you plan to do about that?

MARLES: Well, I think we will see by virtue of what's going on with the tariff announcement by the United States an increase in dumping around the world, and we won't be an exception to that, which is why we wanted to stiffen up our anti-dumping regime, both in terms of the penalties that are applied when dumping occurs but also making sure that we better resource the regulator to be able to deal with this.

You know, whereas earlier I said I think there is credit to be given to the Trump administration in how they have handled certain aspects of foreign policy, this is one area where I think the path that Donald Trump is going down is a negative one for the global economy and for the world, and you know it's absolutely in the interests of the global economy and very much in Australia's national interests that we see an open, trading America, and any move towards being more isolationist, in a trading sense, is I think of deep concern and the Foreign Minister described this as a very significant issue of principle. She is right and we need to be contesting it and doing so within the context of our alliance with the United States.

HOST: Richard Marles, just before you go I did want to ask you about education briefly. Bill Shorten has promised to give Catholic schools an extra quarter of a billion dollars in the first two years of a Labor government. Is it your intention to make education funding an election issue?

MARLES: Well, it is. It is a key difference between ourselves and the Coalition. If you look at the proposition that is put out there in relation to the funding of education across the board, not just within the Catholic sector but within the public sector and indeed in the private sector as well, it is a key difference and I absolutely think this will be a big issue at the next election.

Investing in our education is fundamentally important going forward. You know, you go back to 2013 and the Coalition at that time said they would match Labor dollar for dollar in terms of their funding. Now that is a promise that they have broken. They have been lying since then and they have been basically living that lie every day they are in office now, and we certainly intend to make that point going into the next election.

HOST: Have you caved into the Catholic school lobby?

MARLES: Absolutely not. What we're talking about is restoring the cuts that this government is putting in place in respect of the Catholic sector, but not just them - in relation to education across the board. The majority of the cuts to education funding are in fact in the public sector and we're where we're going forward on the basis of promising to restore those cuts as well.

I mean, this is really important, and you know you think about the Batman by-election or a week away. I think that is an issue which people in Northcote and Preston are going to be very focused upon, whether or not their public schools and schools across the board are going to be properly funded going forward. We stand for that proposition and proper needs-based funding allocation of funding for schools. The Liberals are about cutting that.

HOST: Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles, thanks for joining us.

MARLES: Thanks, Andrew.

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