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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
RADIO INTERVIEW
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SUBJECTS: Mosul, Russia; Section 44

HOST: The Australian Defence Force says an RAAF air flight targeting Islamic State is likely to have killed two adults and injured two young children. The strike was part of the nine month battle to free the Iraqi city of Mosul during which an estimated 10,000 civilians were killed. Richard Marles is the Shadow Defence Minister. Richard Marles, welcome back to *RN Drive*.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Good evening, Patricia. How are you?

HOST: Good. You've been briefed by the ADF on this. Were mistakes made in how this airstrike was conducted?

MARLES: No, I don't think mistakes were made. It's clear to me in the briefing that I received that the rules of engagement were followed by our Defence Force personnel and they are very much within the laws of war.

I actually think the clip that you played from the Prime Minister, I think he's right in what he said. This is a really dangerous part of the world and one of the grim realities of war, particularly the way in which ISIS conducts war, is that from the moment ISIS occupied Mosul they put civilians in a place of extreme risk and that's what's occurred and it's obviously a tragic event.

It is clear to me that our Defence Force personnel acted in a very professional way and went through all the procedures that they should do before engaging in a strike of this kind.

HOST: That's right, official investigations show that flight crew followed procedure. Do procedures need to be reviewed, though, in light of the tragedy?

MARLES: No. I think it's important for people to understand that we have a very ethical military, a very ethical Defence Force. I've seen this first-hand. Actually, as it turns out, I was in the combined air operation center in Qatar, where decisions in

relation to the strikes on Mosul were made. I was there 10 days after this event occurred. I saw for myself exactly how we operate, and it's worth understanding that there are many people involved. It's a very thorough process in respect of any given airstrike. In fact, I watched the process play out in front of me and watched the red card played, in the sense that what I was looking refused to go through with the strike because it was felt there was too great a risk to civilians engaged in that particular example.

What it demonstrated to me is that we are operating in a highly ethical standard, well within the laws of war and well above many militaries around the world.

At the end of the day Mosul was a highly dangerous place at that point in time. That was a consequence of the way ISIS operated in ISIS' occupation of Mosul.

It was critically important for the people of Iraq and indeed the people of Mosul that we did everything we could to rid ISIS of that city and indeed of both northern Iraq and northern Syria.

HOST: The ADF has decided to make this public. They weren't necessarily obliged to do this. Why do you think they did that, and is it the right decision?

MARLES: Well, it is the right decision to make it public and it's the right decision to open themselves up to scrutiny, and again it's worth understanding that in relation to this particular incident, and this is the same with all incidents, there were two inquiries: one by the coalition, the group of countries of which we are a part, we were in a sense we are observers of that inquiry; and then the ADF conducted its own inquiry subsequent to that. I think it's very important that in order to have confidence in the way our Defence Forces operate that their conclusions are made public and the people get to see how we operate, and see it when there's success but also see it when there is tragedy.

There's no skirting around the fact that this is a tragic set of circumstances, but that we ought to take some comfort from the fact that this is made public and people are able to have the discussion that's being had today.

HOST: The PM said today that he doesn't know whether Australian authorities can contact the families of the Iraqi civilians who may have died in airstrikes on Mosul. What should happen next? Should there be some kind of compensational process?

MARLES: Oh look I think it's not an easy thing, necessarily, to be in contact with the people concerned. As I was instructed it's not clear that we know where those people are now. It is a difficult process, but at the end of the day we have operated within the appropriate rules and the only other option here was not to conduct the fight, and the consequences to life in that decision would have been far greater than what's occurred here.

HOST: Police say Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with the nerve agent at home. How does that change things, in your view?

MARLES: Well, I think one of the characteristics of this event which is really disturbing is the reckless way in which the Russian state has gone about it and the

potential for civilians to be impacted by this. Quite apart from the fact that it's an obvious breach of sovereignty of the United Kingdom, and it is the first use in an offensive way of a chemical weapon in Europe since the Second World War. So, at a whole range of levels this is an appalling act, but the recklessness of it and the potential for civilians, if you like, to be caught up and themselves to end up extremely ill as a result of this I think is appalling.

We are right to be standing in solidarity with Britain at the moment and right to be in that number of countries at the moment who are taking a stance against the way Russia behaved.

HOST: We saw news cameras invited to the start of a meeting between Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and the Russian ambassador. Was that right, that handling: the cameras there, the stare down, and I suppose the dressing down of the Ambassador, given the situation?

MARLES: Look, I find it hard to comment on that. The reason I find it hard to comment on that is because I don't know what conversation the Foreign Minister would have had with the Ambassador before the cameras were there, and that's pretty pertinent in terms of whether that was handled appropriately or not.

Look, in the bigger picture here it is right that we should be taking action against Russia. I think it is right that those non-disclosed intelligence officers were expelled from the country. I could imagine that Russia will retaliate in some form, but the behavior that Russia is engaged in at this point in time can't be tolerated, and it's important that we are standing in solidarity with Britain.

HOST: And we saw the news yesterday that Kim Jong-un – we're going to be covering this a little later on the program, too, after seven - has committed to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. This follows a meeting in China with President Xi Jinping in Beijing. He has this meeting gazumped that meeting with Donald Trump? How do you view this meeting?

MARLES: No, it's a good question, and I think I might have said to you previously that our view of the North Korean regime and how they operate is so opaque that it is very difficult to understand their intent, and I think that's one of the difficulties in terms of trying to judge what this will mean, but I'd make these observations: it was always going to be important that China be engaged in this process. I actually do take some comfort from the fact that this meeting has occurred and that China is very present in all of this. It would have been a mistake to go down a path of marginalizing China, but to be fair to the United States I think there's been a considerable effort to try and engage China in the resolution of the Korean Peninsula over the course of the last year or two, and indeed it seems to me that China have stepped up in terms of the way in which they've engaged.

On the face of it it's obviously good news that Kim Jong-un is committing to this in the way that he has, but North Korea has been a very unreliable country and partner over the journey, so I don't think for a second that we can take this to the bank and expect that this is all done and dusted now, and that ultimately is going to be the

issue in terms of the summit that occurs between President Trump and Kim Jong-un. It is it is the kind of reliability of whatever is the outcome of that meeting.

Now, you know it is better that people are talking than they're fighting. I do personally feel hopeful about how this all plays out, but the concern, obviously, is that ultimately it turns into a false hope.

HOST: Just finally on a domestic issue, Rodney Colleton, Barnaby Joyce Scott Ludlam, Fiona Nash, Malcolm Roberts, Larissa Waters, won't have to pay back their salaries and other costs. They were obviously disqualified under Section 44, but that announcement today, just before Easter: fair enough?

MARLES: I think that's fair enough, in the sense people have been conducting work under the belief that they've been duly elected, and so I don't think it's appropriate that people should be having to pay that back-

HOST: -Even though it was really their responsibility to ensure that they were adhering to the Constitution?

MARLES: At the end of the day people have been attending work and have been performing the work of a senator or a member of the house, and I personally don't think it would be fair to ask them to repay their salary. There's no question that they have paid a price, in terms of not not fully going through the process of understanding whether or not they are a citizen of another country, but I don't think it's unreasonable that a situation evolves where they're not required to pay that back.

HOST: Richard Marles, thank you so much for your time tonight.

MARLES: It was a pleasure, Patricia.

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