

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS LIVE
THE BOLT REPORT
MONDAY, 9 APRIL 2018**

SUBJECTS: China; Syria; Newspill

HOST: Joining me is the Defence spokesman for Federal Labor, Richard Marles. Richard, thank you so much for your time. I mean, this is a bit worrying, or what do you think? Should we be worrying about China?

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well, certainly China is critically important to Australia's strategic future, as is of course the United States and the relationship between these two countries, and their respective relationships to our region is going to define the landscape in which we live for certainly as long as I'm involved in politics, so there are no bigger issues on the global stage for Australia than these.

China is much more assertive now than it has been, perhaps, ever, and we are seeing that in terms of the South China Sea, the assertion of a sovereignty there which would seem inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and that is obviously an issue for us because more than half of Australia's trade goes through the South China Sea and the freedom of navigation of that trade, if you like, is very much a part of Australia's national interest. We need to be making sure that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is how we understand and what actually applies to what's going on the South China Sea.

So, these are these are very big issues and they go to the heart of our national interest.

HOST: Can you see how this could develop into a real flashpoint?

MARLES: Well I think it is a concern, what's happening there. I absolutely think there is much to be worried about.

There is a lot of interaction, I would say, between the United States and China to try and make sure that there are no misunderstandings and that there is no unintended conflict, but at the end of the day it does matter to Australia that these are regarded

as international waters; that we can sail through freely and that our trade can pass back and forth; and that's critically important to our economic prosperity.

This matters to Australia. It's front and center in terms of our national interest and it's important that that that we're part of an international community which seeks to a certain UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea.

HOST: Because the reason for that is if China took issue with us just to put pressure on us and its sovereignty, well its claims to sovereignty of that huge sea was not challenged, it could just put its foot on our throat given all the trade that goes through that particular piece of water, couldn't it?

MARLES: Well, it's 60 percent of our trade, Andrew, but a large part of the global trade goes through the South China Sea, so it's a critically important global artery really, and so it matters significantly.

Now, what we've seen with the building of the artificial reefs in the South China Sea are actions which are inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Court of Arbitration has found it to be such, and we regard that as having meaning.

These global rules-based orders, the Bretton Woods institutions that have been in existence since the Second World War which really have underpinned the stability of East Asia and been an important part of our prosperity, but might I say they've also been an important part of China's growing prosperity, are really important to protect, and America has been one of the-

HOST: -But what can we do? What can we do? China is too big. It says it wants them. It's sending 40 ships there. Who's going to say no?

MARLES: Well, it is important that as an international community, and Australia needs to be part of this, that we continue to navigate those waters in a way which asserts our interest, and that is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In other words, the right to navigate those waters freely so that our trade can pass in that way. It's important that we continue to do that and that those assertions continue to be made. America is doing that. As a matter of routine we do it, but it's important that that continue to be done by an entire international community.

HOST: More military matters, briefly: the Syrian regime has just killed up to 100 people, including children, in a chemical gas attack. Donald Trump accused Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iran for backing what he called the animal Assad, that's the Syrian dictator, and said there was going to be a price to pay. Well, as it happens a Syrian air base near Homs was then hit by missiles. The US said someone else did it - seems the Israelis, in fact. Now, Donald Trump attacking Vladimir Putin, that is an interesting turn, isn't it?

MARLES: Well, let's just get back to the starting point in terms of what's occurred in Syria. If there has been a use of chemical weapons, as has been reported and that appears to be likely the case, by the Syrian regime, they certainly have a history in respect of this, then that is an act which absolutely deserves international

condemnation, and ultimately is an act which requires consequence. I mean, since the end of the First World War we've had an international convention against the use of chemical weapons. It is a barbaric thing to do. We have seen this regime do it on repeated occasions and we saw it occur last year which then did result in the American missile strikes which occurred in the aftermath of that.

We think it's very important, and the international community does, to make sure that there is a full investigation as to what has occurred here so that we do understand these attacks, understand what's occurred with these attacks, but it is absolutely essential that the world stands up to the use of chemical weapons. That this has been undertaken by the Syrian regime is an outrage.

HOST: Well, I think it's a turnup for the books for Turnbull to call out Vladimir Putin after some of the allegations are that they were too close.

To Australia and to the polls, Malcolm Turnbull, it's true, has scored his 30th losing Newspoll in a row, but can you explain why Labor leader Bill Shorten has been behind Malcolm Turnbull for more than 30 Newspoll polls as preferred prime minister?

MARLES: You know, we can get tied up in polls. Ultimately it's Malcolm Turnbull who has defined himself in terms of polls. It's not the way we go about our business. We're more focused on working out policies for our country and to improve our budget bottom line, for example, but improve the lot of Australians and we're doing what we can to prepare ourselves so that we can go to an election and present an alternative government.

It's actually the Government who have been completely self obsessed and consumed by polls and have defined themselves in that context. What we've seen today with all the commentary around the polls is really nothing other than the inevitable consequence of Malcolm Turnbull-

HOST: -But why is Bill Shorten behind for so long? You don't want to define yourself, but why has he been behind for all that time and more?

MARLES: Well, we have been putting forward our policies, and obviously we can we can talk about that part of the polls, we can talk about the 2PP result with the polls, but ultimately I actually don't think that's the critical issue.

I mean, the critical issue is about whether or not we are doing a job as an opposition in terms of building a credible alternative agenda, and that's absolutely what we are doing.

We are being far from policy small, Andrew. We are coming up with propositions which actually seek to improve the budget bottom line, which deal with issues such as debt and deficit.

HOST: Yeah, through taxing.

MARLES: Well, the only policy you're seeing from the Government at the moment is from particular backbenchers who are seeking to put forward policy propositions

which undermine the Prime Minister. That's literally the only policy thought which is going on in the Government right now.

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

MARLES: It's a pleasure, Andrew.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll ALP Canberra