

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
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SUBJECT/S: New Chief of the Defence Force; Syria.

HOST: Well for more on this I'm joined by the Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles. Thanks very much for joining us this afternoon. Why is Angus Campbell the best choice to be the next Chief of Defence?

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well, we do welcome the appointment. I've known Angus Campbell for a long time and he's a very decorated Australian soldier and he has played a fantastic role in a range of jobs that have been given to him over the journey.

I think Angus is obviously a very safe pair of hands. He's a very competent and professional serviceman, but he's also known as great analytical skills. He's very empathetic, very creative. He'll be an innovative person in this role and I think he's a very thoughtful man, and all of those are qualities that you'd want in our Chief of Defence Force and I'm sure he's going to do a great job in this role.

HOST: Of course, Labor hasn't always seen eye to eye with Angus Campbell. When he was leading Operation Sovereign Borders, your predecessor in the role of Shadow Defence Minister, Stephen Conroy, accused him of a political cover up during a rather fiery Senate hearing back in 2014.

MARLES: I think all of that's in the past, and I'd say this, that during that period of time I had a lot to do with Angus, as I was then the Shadow Immigration Minister, and as the head of Operation Sovereign Borders Angus would brief me frequently on what was going on.

HOST: Did you think he was engaging in political cover ups?

MARLES: I thought Angus was completely fulsome in the information he provided to me, and again: very professional, very analytical. He was trying to deal with an incredibly difficult problem [audio break] we all understand, and ultimately did get to a point where that terribly dangerous and deadly journey between Java and Christmas Island was brought to an end, and that's a good thing.

HOST: So in retrospect Labor thanks him, agrees this was the right policy?

MARLES: Well, you know that our view is that we support turn backs between Java and Christmas Island and bringing to an end that journey has been an achievement of this Government and we've been supportive of that. You're well aware of that, David, and we'd make various criticisms -

HOST: And I know you went through quite a process at the last national conference in getting Labor to that position, but just reflecting on that moment of friction between Labor, and particularly Stephen Conroy at the time and Angus Campbell, I mean could you understand what Stephen Conroy was talking about then, or was he a lone voice on the part of Labor critical of Angus Campbell at the time? I mean, what is your reflection of that moment?

MARLES: I probably choose not to reflect on that moment, David. I think that's in the past and you've got Stephen as a contributor to Sky News now, you might want to ask him those questions.

I've got to say the dealings I had with Angus all along during that period, and I had many, were highly professional, and I know the very difficult job he was trying to perform and ultimately he did with an enormous amount of success. It is a good result for the country, but it's actually a good result in terms of compassion and humanitarianism that we brought to an end a journey which saw so many people perish at sea, and that's why we support the outcome of that. We support what he did then and that's certainly our [audio break]

HOST: Is he, you know these figures well, the service chiefs, Richard Marles: is he the best choice out of the available options to be the new Chief of Defence?

MARLES: At one level, it is a very hard choice to make because there are really great people leading our Defence Force. Maybe that's an obvious observation to make, but it's probably worth me saying that since being in this role, and indeed prior, I've been continually impressed by the calibre of those who are leading our Defence Force and Angus is very much amongst them.

HOST: But is he the option? Is he the best choice?

MARLES: I think he is the best choice and he is going to do a great job in this role, and as I said before he's highly professional. He knows his stuff, but Angus is very thoughtful and he's creative and he'll be innovative in the way he goes about his business. I'm not sure what I expected when I took on this role, in terms of how higher brass would present themselves. Angus actually isn't that for me. He is

somebody who is a really impressive person, not that I wasn't expecting impressive people to do this, but he's going to do a great job.

HOST: Do you think the personal situation around Ray Griggs, his affair with the woman he's now married to, did that factor play against him, do you think, in this decision?

MARLES: Ultimately that's a question that the Government needs to answer. What I would say is I hope it didn't.

Ray Griggs is, again, in that category of people who have been leading our Defence Force who is a really fine officer, and, again, a very professional person. I've got to know Ray, as lots of members of parliament will have, through his overseeing the parliamentary program which gives us the opportunity to see Defence at work firsthand as we are embedded in various [audio break] for a week. Ray oversees that program. We talk to him about it. We've all got to know him and he's somebody who's held in the highest regard by those who know him. I'm sure Ray would have done a great job as that as the CDF as well, but at the end of the day you can only choose one person, and I think Ray should and will look back on his career with an enormous amount of pride. It's been incredibly decorated career, rising as he has to the Vice Chief of the Defence Force.

HOST: Well we now have a new Chief of Defence coming, a new Vice Chief, a new Army Chief, new Navy Chief, new Chief of Joint Operations, so it is quite a sweeping change in the senior hierarchy of Defence, and that's not always unusual when terms come to an end, but what would be your message about the sort of direction Defence needs to go in under this new leadership? Should it continue on the path that it's on? Would you have any advice?

MARLES: Well I think you are right in making the observation that there is a significant turnover at one moment. Whether that's ideal I'm not sure, but what I do know is that at the end of the day we're talking about a group of people who know each other well, and so they will seamlessly-

HOST: -Are you expressing a note of caution that this is too much change at the top all at once?

MARLES: Well, I think it's important given how much change there is that those coming in are mindful of it, and I'm sure they will be. One of the things that the Defence Force is really good at is succession planning, so all of those who are now filling the roles that they're about to fill will do so with an enormous amount of experience, and that none of it is going to be a surprise to them in terms of the roles that they're performing, but there is literally a new team coming into existence. Other than the Chief of the Air Force, who will continue through for another year, we're seeing a change at the top.

In terms of advice, I know we are going through a very tumultuous period, I think, a tumultuous period in terms of global affairs and therefore Australia's place in it, and

the Defence Force is a critical and acute expression of Australia's place in the world and you see that in terms of the role that we're playing in the Middle East at the moment, for example. I think there does need to be deep thought about the Defence Force's role in relation to the sort of world that we're facing.

The other point I'd make is that we're also going through a significant period of procurement and expenditure as there is a bipartisan commitment to take our spending up to 2 percent of GDP, and that is seeing a lot of equipment coming in to play, and, again, making sure that that is happening in as sensible a manner as possible and as well thought out a manner as possible is going to be critically important and a real challenge for the new senior leadership of the ADF.

HOST: You mention our role in the Middle East. Australia didn't take part in these missile strikes against chemical weapons facilities in Syria. The Prime Minister has not ruled out doing so in the future. Realistically though, do you see any role for Australia in policing, in punishing Syria if there are further breaches of these international rules around the use of chemical weapons?

MARLES: I suppose the practical answer to that question is it's not obvious to me what that role would be, but we do support the stance that the international community has taken. Necessarily, I think what that means if you believe that Australia should play its part in the world is that if there is some kind of a sensible and practical request on Australia in the future you'd want to look at that. It's not obvious to me what that would be at the moment and so I don't think that such a request is likely.

It's important as a global community that we stand up against the use of chemical weapons. It's really been outlawed in international law for the better part of a century now and it is important that when you draw a line that line has meaning. I think I've said previously in the last week that if it's shown, and it has been, that the Assad regime used chemical weapons that can't be allowed to go without consequence.

HOST: So just finally then, Richard Marles, should this happen every time chemical weapons are used, because the estimates are Bashar al-Assad has done it 34 times in Syria. We've only seen US and allied missile retaliation twice, certainly in the last year. Are you saying every time there is evidence of chemical weapons being used there should be this response?

MARLES: Look, I actually think that's a difficult question for me to answer without having the full operational information in front of me, but I guess what I'd say as a matter of principle is this: we need to be doing everything within our power in the international community to stop actors like the Assad regime from using chemical weapons.

Now, shaping people's behaviour, shaping regimes like that's behaviour, is a difficult thing to do but we need to be trying to do it because it's completely unacceptable for a regime like that to go unchallenged in the use of chemical weapons. Now, I think having drawn a line like this it must have consequence, and so significant steps need

to be taken to bring Syria to a point where they stop using those weapons and that's got to be the goal of the international community.

HOST: Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles, appreciate your time this afternoon. Thank you.

MARLES: Thanks David.

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