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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
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SUBJECTS: North Korea; Iran; French President's visit to Australia; Australia and China in the Pacific

HOST: Let's go live to Washington. The Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles joins me, who's been there for a series of talks and other dialogues in in Washington. Richard Marles, let's start with these developments on North Korea. I know you haven't been that positive about the Trump approach to foreign policy in terms of the use of Twitter and so on, but his approach seems to be working.

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: Well, I do think that presenting a harder edge in relation to North Korea and seeking to get China involved has been the right prescription, and that's something I've been saying for some time now. The Trump administration deserves credit for that.

I do remain very much a sceptic about diplomacy by tweet. I'm not a fan of the idea of unpredictability as a tactic, but I do think that that fundamental prescription of presenting the harder edge to North Korea and getting the world involved, which was fundamental in terms of making sure that there was a sanctions regime that could play a role.

But look, there's a long way to go, Kieran. I think that, certainly, the images we saw last week were remarkable. The upcoming meeting between the two presidents will be even more remarkable, but we've got a long way to go before we can start popping the champagne just yet.

HOST: Yeah, the doctrine of unpredictability, this approach might not be the traditional way of doing things in terms of foreign policy but clearly it spooked some in the international community, not the least of which the dictator in Pyongyang.

MARLES: Oh look, I don't know whether that's right. What I know is that making it clear that strategic patience was over was important, and I think making it clear that there was going to be a much greater degree of coordination with China and then with the rest of the world in terms of imposing a sanctions regime on North Korea

which would have the impact of biting, I think that's what's actually made the difference here. I certainly hope that's what's made the difference here.

But look, there is still a long way to go and we need to be clear about what North Korea's intentions are here. It is such an opaque regime that it's hard to know what is motivating them. At the end of the day it's got to be clear that they are not just ceasing nuclear testing but actually removing their nuclear capability. That's what denuclearization has to mean on the north on the Korean peninsula in order to provide the world with safety.

HOST: You've been holding talks in Washington and getting a sense of the place under Donald Trump, and you know that around him increasingly are foreign policy hawks like John Bolton, like the new Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. If this is a gamble from Kim Jong-un, it's a massive one, isn't it, given what could be the response?

MARLES: Well, again, it's hard to know exactly what Kim Jong-un is seeking to do, what is motivating him, because our view of the North Korean regime is so opaque. If what is going on here is that he has been brought to the table by the sanctions that have been imposed on his country, well then that is a good thing because that does give us some optimism about where he is prepared to go, but what it also then says is that the pressure the international community is applying to North Korea has to continue. Equally if there's any hesitation on his part or double words in the sense of whether or not he actually means to give up on his nuclear capability. That would be a concern.

A ceasing of nuclear tests on their own doesn't answer the question as to whether or not North Korea is going to give up its nuclear capability and that's what ultimately needs to be made clear. I've got no doubt that both the South Koreans and the Americans, and I'm sure the Chinese, in the conversations they've had with the North Koreans, we'll be wanting to press that point.

HOST: The new Secretary of State, Mr. Pompeo, has said that Iran has carried out systematic deception of the world. It follows that presentation from Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday. What's your view on all of this, given our Government's position has been to encourage the US to stick to the Iran deal?

MARLES: Well, Labor's view is that of the Government, which is to try and encourage the continuation of the deal. We've had, as the Government's had, as the world has had, reservations about Iran and their motives as well, but it is about how you best manage the situation, and, you know, there are strict compliance measures in the deal which provide for international oversight of Iran's activities in this space. That is a positive at this moment, that there is an ability for the world to look at Iran's behaviour. To that end the UN has made it clear that there is no evidence that Iran is seeking to pursue nuclear weapons in contravention of the deal.

So, they are important factors to bear in mind here, and I think what is also important is that if you start talking about taking Iran out of the deal, what we want to be sure that we're not taking the world to a worse place, so I think hastening slowly would be the order of the day here and we agree with the Government in that respect.

HOST: Something closer to home, something you've been focused on a lot over many years now is the South Pacific, and Emmanuel Macron is in town, the French President meeting with the Prime Minister today, and part of their discussion is going to be the South Pacific, an area where the French have traditionally had a role. What's your view on what should be done, of course all of this in the context of some fears about the Chinese increasing their assertiveness in that part of the world?

MARLES: In terms of the French, I'm very excited about the prospect of France being more engaged in the Pacific beyond its territories, and also the prospect of us working more closely with France in that regard. France is a huge player in the Pacific, as it is, I might say, in the Indian Ocean, by virtue of the territories that it has there, and indeed the assets and resources that exist within those territories, within French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna, and what we're talking about is a stable liberal democracy with a presence in the region. So that's something that we should be working with and encouraging to stay.

I think it would be true to say that France has been reticent over the journey to get involved in a significant way beyond its territories, but I think we ought to be encouraging France to play a bigger role and for the French territories themselves to play a bigger role and for us to engage in more cooperation.

There is some cooperation that occurs right now, particularly in relation to responses to disasters and humanitarian issues where we work cooperatively with the French Navy based in New Caledonia, but I think there's a whole lot more that we can do together in the Pacific.

It's worth understanding that if you think about maritime borders as being borders, France shares its largest border with any country with us, and indeed the closest population to Canberra is that in New Caledonia, so in many respects France is a next door neighbour, but we've never seen them quite in that way. I hope that that's how we see them going forward.

HOST: In relation to your focus on China and the Pacific you're going to give an address in Washington, I think over the next day or so, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and we talk to Andrew Shearer one of the senior fellows at that center. What's your view when it comes to China in the Pacific? What will you be articulating when you address that think tank?

MARLES: Well we've had the reports, of course, over the last few weeks about China's discussions, if they occurred or didn't, in relation to Vanuatu, and I note that both China and Vanuatu deny the prospect of a military base occurring in Vanuatu. We've got reports in the last couple of days about China's private sector involvement in Solomon Islands, which is interesting because Solomons have recognised Taiwan, so it is interesting that China are now involved there as well.

HOST: Private sector, but when you see private sector you just assume that it's state influenced as well, because having read that report yesterday in *The Australian* it was private sector interests, but with any private sector interest do you necessarily read in the hand of Beijing as well?

MARLES: Well, I think the issue when you're talking about the private sector coming out of China is that so much of the Chinese economy is based on state-owned enterprises that it's impossible not to look to whether or not there is an influence and a greater strategic objective beyond whatever the particular investment is. Now it may be completely innocent, and you know it would be a good thing to see greater tourist activity in Solomon Islands; it would be good to see the fish exports from French Polynesia into China.

I think for me what all of it says is that we have to lift our game. This has to be a wake-up call in terms of our behaviour, and to me the way China is behaving is the way I would expect them to behave, and indeed the way the countries of the Pacific, by and large, is the way I would expect them to react.

What's missing here is Australia playing its role, its natural role, as the partner of choice for the countries of the Pacific, but that's not a relationship which the countries of the Pacific are going to accept if we treat it as a relationship by right. We actually have to earn it, and that means we have to demonstrate that we care about the Pacific and actually have a vision for it; show leadership within it and demonstrate a commitment to it; and that is the principal challenge in this space for us. I actually think that's what we need to do and I'm very confident that if we do that, and if we establish ourselves in the way that I think the countries in the Pacific want us to establish ourselves, then we can be the partner of choice, but we actually have to do it and see the Pacific is just as important in our world view as the key relations that we have with countries like China and the US.

HOST: Richard Marles live from Washington. Thanks for that. Appreciate it.

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