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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TV INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS LIVE
AM AGENDA
THURSDAY, 14 JUNE 2018**

SUBJECTS: Singapore summit; Huawei; SAS

HOST: Now, some concern from analysts that Donald Trump has given too much away in stopping these war games that he's already agreed to do so, but perhaps this is a bit of a tactic. He's giving this up and this is an early sign that he is willing to actually do something here. If North Korea doesn't play ball you can just start up the war games again, can't you?

RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE: All of this, I think, is hard to judge from where we sit now. I mean, ultimately, at the end of the day, the proof of this is going to be in the eating. What we need to see is the denuclearization of North Korea. Whether or not any of these steps has been a good idea, from the summit to begin with through his statements in relation to the exercises, is going to be determined by whether we actually see North Korea eventually denuclearization.

HOST: So you can't say given too much away yet now? Whatever the process is if you give something first then get it later, it's the final outcome?

MARLES: It has to be the final outcome, and you're right, it is very it's hard to judge in the sense that maybe exercises could be turned back on. I mean, we're talking about a president who initiated a summit, turned it off, turned it back on, all within a few weeks. Obviously Donald Trump does things in a different way, but at the end of the day the bottom line has to be the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear capabilities, such as they've attained it, and that's how we should be judging this process, and I would make the point that I think from here on in the sorts of critical issues which have brought it to this point, which is actually presenting a harder edge to North Korea, making sure that there is significant pressure on them, involving China in the process, I think those are going to be the key issues going forward to bring North Korea to a point of denuclearization.

HOST: Well, there's war games, and then there's maybe taking out the troops altogether. If that does happen, would that be a bridge too far, or is that a fair enough trade-off to stop what is a problem hovering over the world?

MARLES: Well look, I think that's a long way down the track, and-

HOST: -It's being spoken about already by Donald Trump.

MARLES: But I think we need to be taking one step at a time here. Ultimately, what is clear to me is that the present and real threat facing the world has been North Korea's nuclear program and the capability that they've achieved to this point in time. That has to be dismantled and it has to be dismantled completely. I don't think that happens without maximum pressure continuing.

HOST: But that possibility of every US troop going out of South Korea, is that in of itself a bit of a red line? Is it the US pulling out of the region, almost, and leaving it to China?

MARLES: In that sense I think having an American presence in East Asia is very much in Australia's interest, and I think we would want to be having a say or having a conversation with America about that.

HOST: That would be a bit of a concern if, if every troop was suddenly-

MARLES: -Well, I think again you'd want to understand how that fitted within America's posture more generally within East Asia, but our interest lies in having a greater American presence in East Asia not a reduced American presence in East Asia, so we'd want to see how it fitted in that context.

Obviously, if we look at the Korean peninsula in isolation it has been a threat for a long period of time. A denuclearized North Korea is obviously a fantastic outcome for the world. It's still a long way off. An aspiration is a good step forward and there's hope associated with that as we've seen this week. We've been there before. We actually need to see this followed through.

HOST: Speaking of China, reports today Huawei will be blocked from any building of the 5G network. Is that a good call, given what we know are concerns raised about security here?

MARLES: Well I think it's important that in making decisions of this kind we're listening to our national security agencies. Certainly when we were in government that's what we did, and a call of that kind was previously made in relation to Huawei and national security clearly matters. This is a fundamental piece of infrastructure. If we were in government we'd be listening to those national security agencies to get their advice on this.

HOST: You agree with it, on the face of it?

MARLES: On the face of it, given that it replicates a decision that was made under the Labor Government, the answer was yes.

HOST: I'm intrigued about this because Australia and the Solomon Islands have also signed this deal for our foreign aid program to in effect build this data cable between

us and the Solomon Islands, in part to make sure Huawei wasn't building it because of security concerns. The Government was asked about this. They didn't mention China or the threat. They just said we came in with an offer. You said the Government has got the rhetoric wrong on this. Were they right to be very diplomatic about this? Did you agree with the way Julie Bishop handled this when asked yesterday?

MARLES: At the end of the day it's the outcome which matters here. It is the right thing, I think, that Australia is stepping up and building this cable. I guess I would have preferred that Australia was the natural partner of choice for Solomon Islands from the outset.

HOST: But just the way that was handled yesterday, because, again, you've been critical in the rhetoric. The unnecessary China baiting, I think that's been described as. Did you watch the way Julie Bishop handled this yesterday, refused to buy in to our attempts at getting a grab, if you like?

MARLES: Well I think foreign ministers should resist the temptation to give juicy grabs, so if she resists that it's to her credit, but ultimately what I'm interested in here is the outcome. I think it is important that the Government stepped up here, but I'd also make the point that what concerns me in relation to Solomon Islands was that in respect of this cable we weren't the partner of choice from the outset. We should be the natural partner of choice.

HOST: Which I know you've spoken for and what we're doing in the Pacific.

I want to finish on what is happening in the SAS, an inquiry going on into our Special Forces. Three Afghan men, of course, killed in a village. All sorts of other reports, including an elderly unarmed detainee shot dead in some sort of almost bloodying ritual from an SAS member, and the latest, not the SAS necessarily, but a Nazi swastika flag, evidence, photographic evidence that one was flown over an Australian Defence vehicle in Afghanistan in 2007. What on earth is going on?

MARLES: Well, that is a very distressing image, and I understand that there were sanctions placed on the individuals involved at the time. This dates back to 2007.

Obviously, what we have read in the Fairfax media around the SAS is appalling reading in terms of the allegations that have been made in relation to a small group of members of the SAS. I think what matters here is the reputation of our Defence Forces, because that is profoundly important for our nation, and to make sure that reputation is maintained these issues need to be dealt with as thoroughly and as transparently as possible and, within reason, as expeditiously as possible.

Now I actually think it is to the Defence Force's credit that we've seen a report be completed, the Crompvoets report, and other two inquiries initiated into what's happened with the SAS, but it's less than ideal that we learn about this through leaked to the media. I actually think the Government needs to get in front of this and own it, in a sense, so that we are making sure that the reputation of our Defence Forces is maintained.

HOST: And you want as much of the inquiry to be made public as possible?

MARLES: Indeed.

HOST: What about the culture and the secrecy around our Special Forces? Now, we are always told that they need this, they can't be identified for various reasons. Do we need to look at the extent to which there is this cloak of secrecy around the SAS?

MARLES: I actually think the national security arrangements around the SAS is appropriate, and indeed all our Special Forces, so I don't make any comment about that. I think in terms of releasing the information in the Crompvoets report it needs to be done subject to those kind of concerns-

HOST: -Names redacted and so.

MARLES: That kind of thing, but the reality is that information from the Crompvoets report has been released. It's been released through leaking. It has found its way into the public domain.

That is less than ideal and what we need to have a sense from the Government is that this really is being dealt with as transparently and as thoroughly as possible, and actually that's ultimately in the interests of the reputation of the Defence Forces themselves and that's what we need to be focusing on at the moment.

The reading that all of us engaged in last weekend was absolutely appalling and we need to understand exactly what reports have found, to the best extent possible, and what the steps are going forward in terms of dealing with this.

HOST: Richard Marles, thanks for your time today.

MARLES: Thanks, Tom.

ENDS

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