

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TV INTERVIEW  
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***SUBJECTS: Liberal in-fighting; ministerial re-shuffle; China; the Pacific; Afghanistan***

**HOST:** Richard Marles, welcome to the program.

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** Pleasure to be here, Graham.

**HOST:** I guess I have to start by asking you what you made of last week, which was arguably the most extraordinary week I've seen in politics and even left some of the weeks of the Whitlam Government flailing in its wake, it was just so bad.

**MARLES:** Given your experience in politics, that's a very big call. Certainly from my point of view it was a remarkable week. I've been asked the question a lot, actually. There was a sense, obviously, from a Labor point of view in which we look with, I guess, some kind of hope and expectation about what this might mean for the future, although there is a long way to go between now and the election and we don't take anything for granted.

I've got to say, Graham, before too long in watching it I found it difficult to watch. I could just feel the way in which the Australian public were reacting to the Liberal Party, but to politics in general, and I think it was a shockingly unedifying spectacle for the way in which the Liberal Party is going but the way in which politics is going. In that sense, I actually found it quite an unpleasant experience.

**HOST:** I think for the average punter out there, it reflects on every politician. You don't have to be in the Liberal Party for it to reflect upon you. I think they think in Canberra they are playing games and they're not worried about the citizenry at all. They're just full of hate and bile and they are taking it out on each other, and while they're doing that there is no-one minding the till or looking after the shop.

**MARLES:** I think that's exactly right. Certainly in terms of being back in my electorate since, what you hear people crying out for is stable government and a sense that what Canberra should be about is them, is ordinary citizens, people in Geelong, people around the country and the challenges and the difficulties they're increasingly finding in everyday life. When they look at a government which is utterly obsessed with itself, and is entirely focused on issues to do with itself, it's profoundly disillusioning.

In that, obviously, there is an opportunity for Labor but it is also the real challenge for us, I think, because we now need to make sure we are presenting, and I hope we are, as being an alternative government which is really focused on the Australian people and perhaps has learnt the lessons from the time that we were going through some of these same travails back in 2013. I think we have learnt that lesson by virtue of how stable we've been since then, but giving a practical expression to the fact that, as an alternative government, we would be a government interested in solving people's problems and not interested in playing games in Canberra.

**HOST:** I can recall when Gillard was knocking off Rudd, being sent down to Canberra and doing a freezing early morning set-up just out the front of Parliament House and it was an extraordinary time. I don't wish it to return for Labor.

**MARLES:** No.

**HOST:** I don't wish it to return for anyone, really, because it makes the mood terrible.

I'm wondering, though, I'm disappointed in the Labor Party a little, I must say. I don't understand why the Labor Party is opposing the idea, because we don't know yet if it is real, the idea of Julie Bishop becoming Governor-General. I sat in the government that gave Bill Hayden the job. I think Bill Hayden carried out the job with distinction. I think Paul Hasluck carried out the job with distinction. I don't see any great problem with appointing somebody from the other side. Remember, Labor got sacked in '75 by its own appointee.

**MARLES:** That's right, whoever gets appointed ended up doing their own job but I guess what I'd say, Graham, is I think if this government wanted to absolutely confirm the perception out there in the community that they are all about themselves, then appointing one of their own to the Governor-Generalship will do exactly that. I reckon, right now, in terms of this moment in time, appalling optics and surely there is an alternative which can give a sense that the Government is actually on the side of the people.

**HOST:** Well, I think we'll just have to agree to disagree on that. I think she'd be a good choice. I think she, too, would serve with the distinction. I think the world of her. I know she is disappointed she only got 11 votes and no Western

Australians voted for her. Of course, she gave Morrison a couple of days' start in a 3-day race. Pretty hard to catch up, isn't it?

**MARLES:** Don't take what I said as a reflection on Julie Bishop. I know Julie well. When we were in government I held the junior role in Foreign Affairs. She shadowed me, in a sense. I went on a number of visits and trips with her and got to know Julie quite well. There is no doubt she served our country with distinction. When Julie Bishop decides she is going to like you, you have no choice: you end up liking her. In that sense, she has been a great diplomat for Australia.

But do I think, right now, given the way in which there is a sense that Canberra is completely obsessed with itself and that this government is obsessed with itself, appointing one of your own to the Governor-Generalship right now I don't reckon is the right move.

**HOST:** The other thing is that of course she has been replaced in Foreign Affairs by Marise Payne. Marise Payne was your Minister, because you are shadow for Defence. I don't think – you can correct me if I'm wrong - that I ever saw her do a one-on-one interview with anyone.

**MARLES:** It was pretty rare, and I think that is going to be a challenge for Marise going forward. As a person Marise is thoroughly decent, but what Marise's views are on foreign policy, in terms of any depth, I wouldn't know and it would be difficult to know because she has been one of the more quiet ministers that we have seen in the Government and the Foreign Minister is a role where it's very important that Australia's position on international affairs is very clearly articulated.

I know, obviously, Marise is a supporter of the alliance, as you would expect, and we have seen that in the way she has held the Defence portfolio, but she is certainly going to need to be a lot more vocal than she has been because it is really important that our Foreign Minister is, in a sense, the voice of our country globally.

**HOST:** I don't think you can be the Minister for Foreign Affairs and not do interviews. There are so many things in which we're interested around the globe. We've got soldiers in other places. I mean, you can't just sit there and say nothing. Then again, I wouldn't have thought you could do that in Defence and she managed to say nothing in Defence.

**MARLES:** I was going to make that observation as well. I was going to say I don't think Foreign Affairs is a place for the shy, but probably the general proposition is that politics isn't a place for the shy. In any event, certainly Marise needs to speak up a little more.

**HOST:** There is no doubt about that. Just looking at some issues in your portfolio, are you concerned about the Chinese lending money to all these Pacific nations that they can't possibly pay back?

**MARLES:** Look, what I'm concerned about ultimately is Australia's presence or lack of intent within the Pacific. I think we need to be making ourselves the natural partner of choice. We need to be taking the Pacific far more seriously than we have been. I think the fact that the Pacific now doesn't find itself in a portfolio in the Morrison Ministry is a real problem. I think the first decision of Prime Minister Morrison not to attend the Pacific Island Forum leaders' meeting - which is a leaders' meeting - again sends a message. So, they are the first two messages the Pacific are going to be hearing from this government.

I guess the point that you make in relation to China is that the Pacific have choices and they've had that for a long time, so if we've got concerns about the way the Pacific acts, then actually what we need to be doing is earning the right to be the natural partner of choice in the Pacific. I don't think we can complain about the Pacific looking towards other places, and nor is what China's doing unexpected.

China are spreading its wings and they've been doing so for a while. The issue here is that this is the part of the world where we are expected to lead and yet we don't. It's really important that we start doing that and the first utterances of the new Morrison Government are actually pretty depressing on that score.

**HOST:** One of the problems has been, of course, that we've cut and cut and cut when it comes to overseas aid, haven't we, over the last few years?

**MARLES:** Look, that's true and aid is totemic and it certainly sends a message. The Government might argue there has been some quarantining of the Pacific, but certainly the Pacific notices what we do across the space in relation to aid, but actually we need an agenda in the Pacific which goes well beyond aid. We've got to stop having a reflex, which I think this Government has demonstrated, which is the only thing you do in the Pacific is provide aid. It is much more than that.

We actually need to be working with them as partners and actually trying to solve the problem of how the population in the Pacific is going to develop, because, right now against the Millennium Development Goals, which were a relative scale, this was the slowest-developing region of the world. By some measures, through the 2020s the Pacific will become the least developed part of the world. on current trends. In other words, Africa will overtake it.

That actually has something to do with us. It's not going to be solved with aid alone, albeit aid is really important, but we've actually got to have bigger ideas and develop a bigger agenda and start demonstrating to these countries that we are fair dinkum about their future and we care. I'm not sure you do that by cutting out a Pacific ministry from the ministry as your first act and then not turning up to the Pacific leaders' meeting when the Australian Prime Minister is the very person people look forward to seeing the most. I think it is an appalling score card within the very first few days of the Morrison prime ministership.

**HOST:** If we can turn to Afghanistan, we've still got troops on the ground - a lot less troops, but we still have them there. Does it ever end in Afghanistan?

**MARLES:** It is a good question. I don't know the answer to it and because we don't really know the answer to that question, I think where that then takes us is the efforts we engage in in Afghanistan have to be sustainable: sustainable in terms, obviously, of lives not being lost; sustainable in terms of the financial commitment through our resources that we're putting into Afghanistan.

Now, I actually think our commitment right now is sustainable. We are doing good work. We're training particularly the officer corp within the Afghan military. It's greatly appreciated.

Along the way, it is giving Australian Defence Force personnel real operational experience, which is invaluable to our defence forces. So it actually, I think, when you look at it in that sense, makes sense and it is sustainable going forward.

So, we support the commitment that is under way at the moment, but because that threshold question which you asked is so difficult to answer, the way we have to start looking at this is to make sure that whatever we're doing in Afghanistan is sustainable over the journey, over the long-term, because it is hard to know exactly how long we might be there.

**HOST:** Maybe I'm a pessimist but it just seems to me to be a losing fight. It just seems to me that the Taliban are irrepressable. That no matter how many times you send in troops, you send in planes, or you send in drones, they just keep going and they keep winning territory.

**MARLES:** I think we need to take a step back from there. When we first engaged in Afghanistan in the aftermath of September 11, and then, in fact, October 12 the following year, which was the Bali bombing, we had seen Afghanistan be used as a training ground for international terrorism which resulted in the loss of many Australian lives in Bali and, indeed, on September 11 in New York and in Washington.

Afghanistan is not being used as a base for the training of international terrorism today. So, in that sense, the engagement has provided for a strategic denial of international terrorism to the use of Afghanistan.

You are right: the Taliban still exists and it still has a presence and is a force in Afghanistan. The politics of that country are very complicated.

I think we've got to be prepared to be there for the long-term. I think the alternative of the international community leaving Afghanistan is highly problematic given the history prior to the international community being there.

As long as we are there we're building governance, we are building the capability of the Afghan ministry, we're working hand-in-glove with the Afghan Government, and we're doing all of this in a way which is sustainable in terms of our own resources, then that's what we should continue to do and that's what the international community should continue to do.

It's a little bit about setting expectations, having a clear view of that and making sure we can live with what we're doing and right now I think we can.

**HOST:** I hope you're right because it has worried me for some time. I have to leave it there. They are telling me it is time to go. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

**MARLES:** Great talking to you, Graham.

**HOST:** More strength to your arm, mate. You are one of the Labor guys who does very well.

**MARLES:** Thank you.

***ENDS***

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.