

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
ABC
WEEKEND BREAKFAST
SATURDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2018**

SUBJECTS: Terror incident in Melbourne; the Pacific; Submarine procurement; Luke Foley resignation.

ANDREW GEOGHEGAN: The week we are talking with Richard Marles, Shadow Minister for Defence. Richard Marles, welcome.

First let's just take a look at the events like yesterday in Melbourne. What was your response?

RICHARD MARLES: Well obviously it was a shocking incident. It appears to be an act of terror; it does appear to be a lone wolf attack. I think we can take heart from the speed with which our authorities, in this case the Victorian Police, reacted to this and the bravery with which they acted. We are blessed to have some of the best agencies in the world protecting us here and I know there's a high degree of co-operation around terrorist related matters between federal and state agencies and indeed there is a high degree of bipartisanship about this. I know that Bill Shorten has spoken with both Premier Daniel Andrews and the Prime Minister about this incident and we're certainly lending all the cooperation we can where it's needed.

GEOGHEGAN: The man involved was known to authorities. Are you happy with counter-terrorism measures that are in place?

MARLES: Look there's been a lot of work done on counter-terrorism measures now over a long period of time. Very sadly terrorism is a part of our lives not just in Victoria but Australia and the world. But we are handling them well and that's not to be complacent. There's been an awful lot of work here. We need to make sure we get our laws right. But we've been doing that and we need to make sure that our agencies are the best they can be and that they're properly resourced and I believe that's happening too.

GEOGHEGAN: Do you feel as though the Australian people are on board with that, that they're happy with the measures that are in place because it may

mean that some of their freedoms are curtailed in the interests of keeping them safe?

MARLES: Look I think they are. I mean I'm a sports goer and go to major events a lot and, you know, I was at the Grand Final, for example, and it is as well attended as it ever has been. I think Victorians are famous for getting out and going to major events and being in the streets and that is going to continue I'm sure. So I actually think Australians are getting on with living their lives notwithstanding this and that has been enabled by the way in which government has worked together to ensure their safety and to make sure that our agencies are the best they can be. But you know this is obviously a very scary incident and our hearts go out to the family of those who have been hurt and killed in this, and you know we just need to make sure that we are vigilant when it comes to these matters.

GEOGHEGAN: Let's turn to other issues and as we saw this past week the Government has joined yourselves – Labor – in committing to infrastructure investment in the Pacific. Has this come too late?

MARLES: Well look better late than never I guess. I mean we welcome what the Government has said. They followed us in relation to a Pacific infrastructure bank and that's a good thing. If it is coming late to the party the reality is that there has been a neglect on the part of this government for a long time in relation to the Pacific and where it stands in our world view. I think going forward the issue now is that to get proper engagement with the Pacific, which is completely fundamentally important for Australia to do, we need a credible climate change policy; that really is the entry ticket to engagement with the Pacific. Because if you're in a country like Kiribati or Tuvalu or the Marshall Islands, coral atoll nations which are only one or two metres above sea level, this is an existential issue which is felt every minute of every day. And so they look to Australia both to have a credible domestic climate change policy but also to demonstrate a willingness to support them in telling their story to the world. And that's now what's missing from this government.

GEOGHEGAN: Is this all about countering China's rising political and economic influence in the Pacific?

MARLES: Well it needs not to be, is the answer to that question. I mean obviously people are aware of China's influence within the Pacific, and we're not in a position as a country to demand an exclusive relationship with the countries of the Pacific and they are going to work with other countries around the world. And they're going to work with China, or for that matter, anyone else who offers assistance, irrespective of the terms on which it's offered. But I think what is really important in terms of how Australia engages with the Pacific is that we don't do it on terms of seeking to strategically deny others but rather on terms of how we relate to the Pacific itself. This has actually got to be about Australia's relationship with these countries, with the 10 million people who live in the Pacific and our kind of guiding clarion call here needs to be the fact that

this cohort of 10 million people performed worse against the Millennium Development Goals of any area the world. By that measure, in the next 10 years if we don't do something different, this will be the least developed part of the world. Now I think that has something to do with Australia and so we need to be very focused on the people of the Pacific, on their prosperity, on their social indicators and be acting out of a motive to improve their lives.

GEOGHEGAN: But is there a risk then that there will be a bidding war in the Pacific with China, Australia, the United States and so on, bidding for the interests in Pacific nations?

MARLES: Well I think that's exactly why it can't be about strategic denial, because if that's our only motive then it's exactly that kind of bidding war that we'll end up in and you won't achieve strategic denial and we won't actually improve the situation for people in the Pacific. I actually think that Australia is the natural partner of choice for these countries. I think we are the country that they want to work with but we need to demonstrate that we actually care, and that we care about them. And that we don't care about others being there and about stopping them, but we actually care about the people of Pacific. And I think if we demonstrate that and come up with policies around that which – and can I say, infrastructure and the funding of it is important, but it's only one aspect of it. We need to have a much bigger agenda than that and Bill Shorten outlined that much larger agenda in his speech a couple of weeks ago. If we do that then I absolutely think we can be the natural partner of choice and we can improve their lives.

GEOGHEGAN: All right just quickly we're running out of time but a couple of other issues. Firstly, Australia's next generation of submarines. It's a 50 billion dollar projected, it has stalled before it's begun. What's the answer?

MARLES: Well, this hasn't been handled very well by the Government. That's the reality here. In fact it's been a mess since they came to power in 2013. And they've tried to have this built overseas at one point, there was the former Coalition Defence Minister famously said of Australian industry, as represented by ASC, that it didn't have a capacity to build a canoe. And then in an attempt to, kind of, convince a rightfully skeptical public about the fact that they were going to build 12 submarines in Australia, they down-selected far too quickly to one builder of the submarines in the lead up to the last election in 2016. Now that that has placed us at a disadvantage in terms of our bargaining power with Naval Group and the French, and let me say Naval Group is a great company, they build fantastic submarines and so I ultimately think we do have a good partner there. But it's not a surprise to me that the Government is now struggling to conclude the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which is a year overdue, which is the guiding set of principles around how the biggest procurement in Australia's history is going to unfold.

GEOGHEGAN: All right. Now just before you go, of course NSW Labor has been in turmoil this past week. Luke Foley, the Leader, has stepped

down. He's now announced that he won't re-contest his own seat. Should he drop his threat of defamation?

MARLES: Ultimately this is a matter for Luke Foley, so the last thing I'm going to do is give him advice. I mean it is a very sad set of circumstances all round. You know Ashleigh Raper has obviously done a brave thing in terms of making her statement. I note that it wasn't her preference to be put in this situation, first of all, but in terms of this becoming as public as it has been. I very much feel for her today. But it's a very sad state of affairs and I think for all concerned, and particularly for the NSW Labor Party in a political context going forward, they need to be choosing their new Leader this afternoon and moving on.

GEOGHEGAN: Shadow Minister for Defence, Richard Marles, thanks for joining us.

MARLES: Thank you.

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