

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

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
RADIO INTERVIEW  
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**SUBJECTS:** *Australia Indonesia relations; China; the Pacific; APEC; Papua New Guinea*

**HOST:** Welcome back to *RN Drive*.

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** It's a pleasure to be talking to you, Patricia.

**HOST:** Scott Morrison has accused Bill Shorten of taking cues on Australia's foreign policy from external powers after Bill Shorten said the Prime Minister's Israel policy is making the country, and I quote, "look stupid". Are you suggesting we take cues from Indonesia? Should they be determining our foreign policy?

**MARLES:** Well foreign policy is about the way in which we relate to the world, and the idea that you would be developing foreign policy in order to win a handful of votes in the lead up to a by-election in Sydney is breathtaking. I mean, this was Scott Morrison completely acting in his own self-interest and completely against what was obviously in the national interest.

Whatever you think about the question of where our embassy should reside in Israel, the idea that that's being determined in the context of a by-election at the same time as the Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister is in Indonesia without actually reaching the Indonesians to ask them what they think about it is breathtaking and amazing, and the fact that Indonesia has reacted the way it has is completely inevitable and against Australia's national interests.

Patricia, this is completely obvious. What the Prime Minister needs to do is back down, just out and out back down because this is a colossal mistake, but I'm certainly not holding my breath that he's going to step back from his own pride and allow this to occur.

**HOST:** You might oppose the actual suggestion that's been floated, but why should Australia determine its foreign policy based on how other countries think of the foreign policy? Surely we should make our own assessments about what we think is right.

**MARLES:** Of course we should make our own assessments, but let's be clear: what we're talking about here is where our embassy resides in Israel. It is a really sensitive question. The status of Jerusalem is obviously sensitive in the context of negotiations and the relationship between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It is absolutely appropriate that in assessing that sensitivity we are mindful of the views the rest of the countries of the world and particularly those around their neighbours. That's what foreign relations are about, and we need to be navigating the waters of foreign policy in a way which benefits Australia's national interest.

**HOST:** Let's move on to something else. The Prime Minister had a very friendly meeting with the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. Has Australia successfully reset relations with China, and is that a welcomed development?

**MARLES:** Well, I think it is a welcome development that our relationships with China improve. Might I say they started going south when the Government engaged in a similar exercise in the Bennelong by-election last year, when it started describing China in terms which were completely inappropriate and again in order to try and advance their cause in the context of the by-election.

Now, it's taken a year to get back to first base in our relationship with China because of the way the Government behaved back in Bennelong. It just says you know how hopeless they are at dealing with these issues.

There is no doubt that our relationship with China is a profoundly important relationship and it matters that the leadership of our country is able to talk with the leadership of China. There are lots of issues which need to be talked through and a huge agenda to be pursued with China, so yes, sure, it is absolutely good news that our leadership is in a space where they can talk with China, but it should never have got to a point where we had the freeze initially.

**HOST:** Scott Morrison says he made clear Australia's engagement in the Pacific isn't aimed at excluding China. Here he is:

SCOTT MORRISON [CLIP]: Well, what we did talk about was that the announcements that I'd made in relation to the Pacific were not exclusive, that I had deliberately, when I made the announcement when I was at Lavarack up in Townsville, that I noted that we would work with all partners, which would include China.

**HOST:** But isn't the policy of a Pacific infrastructure bank, which Labor and the Coalition both support, aimed at limiting Chinese investment in the region?

**MARLES:** Well, it's really important that the motivation here is not about the strategic denial of others. It's really important that we are engaging with the Pacific on its own terms and on the basis of transforming our relationship for the betterment of the 10 million people who live in the Pacific. Certainly, that's the way Bill Shorten has described-

**HOST:** -But it's disingenuous to say that it has nothing to do with China and China's own expansion in that region.

**MARLES:** Well, while I understand the point that's made, and to carry that a step further earlier this year Connie Fierravanti-Wells was completely explicit in terms of the ambition of this, of the Coalition Government, about seeking to deny China, leading to the Prime Minister of Samoa, Prime Minister Tuilaepa, giving the Australian Government a severe rebuke in that respect. That's because they got the motivation wrong.

It's really important here that we get the motivation right. Look, from my point of view it is a wonderful thing that we are seeing the Pacific growing in terms of a bipartisan sense of Australia's world view, but it's really important that we get the motivation right here because if we go into the Pacific purely on the basis of a strategy of denying others we will fail. It needs to come from the place of actually seeking to improve the lives of the people of the Pacific.

Our clarion call here should not be the presence of China or indeed any other country's activities in the Pacific. It needs to be the fact that this was the cohort which performed worst against the Millennium Development Goals and on the current trends will be the least developed part of the world by the end of the 2020s. I actually think that has something to do with Australia and it's that which we need to address and make sure we are working with the peoples of the Pacific, placing them centrally in our actions so that we actually improve their lives.

**HOST:** China's President, Xi Jinping, has timed a state visit to PNG with the APEC Leaders Summit. He says the Pacific doesn't belong to anyone. He's visiting for four days. Do you see this is China staking its claim?

**MARLES:** Well, I think firstly he's right. The Pacific does not belong to anyone other people of the Pacific.

**HOST:** That's a factual comment, but we know what he's trying to say here. It's at a bit deeper than that, isn't it?

**MARLES:** Sure, but it carries on from the last point, and it is right to say that we don't have a right to say to the Pacific who they should be working with and what help they accept, which is why the comments of Senator Fierravanti-Wells earlier in the year were so counterproductive to Australia's engagement with the Pacific.

The Pacific are completely entitled to make whatever friendships and relationships they want and to accept whatever help they want from whoever, and in that sense it's absolutely right that no-one owns the Pacific.

**HOST:** If you're just tuning in this is our RN *Drive*. I'm Patricia Karvelas and my guest is the Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles:. 0-4-1-8-2-2-6-5-7-6 is our text line.

Australia's defence ties with the Pacific are very much on show at APEC. The ADF is providing security. The HMAS *Adelaide* is moored off the coast. We've seen an agreement to develop a joint naval base on Manus Island. Why is this show of strength important?

**MARLES:** Well I think there's been a long-standing relationship between the Australian Defence Force and the PNG Defence Force and I think there is actually a lot of scope for us to grow that relationship and help build the capability of the PNG Defence Force. That is something which the PNG Defence Force and the PNG Government has by and large welcomed.

Now, this needs to be done, obviously, cooperatively with PNG and our actions need to be based on what PNG want and how we can help them so that they are empowered in this process, but in my experience there is a desire for Australia to lend a hand in terms of building capability and that's a really useful thing for us to do. It's useful in terms of building the sovereignty of Papua New Guinea and indeed those countries in the Pacific which have a defence force, and it's a really practical way in which we can provide assistance.

**HOST:** The Foreign Minister, Marise Payne, has announced the removal of the 2,000 places cap for the Pacific Labour Scheme and a new Office of the Pacific within DFAT. Are they welcome moves?

**MARLES:** Well, firstly in relation to the of the Pacific workers scheme, I'd like to see more of the detail, but it is right to say that I think the more we are providing access to our labour market, particularly where there are shortages of domestic labour to perform work, the more we are providing access to that for people from the Pacific the better, and the seasonal workers program began under the Rudd-Gillard Governments and I've seen firsthand the really powerful impact it has had in the way in which people coming to Australia, earning money, taking that back home, can build their communities within the Pacific. It is a hugely powerful offer to make and scheme to provide, so there is no doubt that that is a good thing.

I think in terms of how DFAT is structured, that's certainly worth thinking through, but let's not forget this is a government which demoted the role of the Pacific in the context of the way in which it structured its ministry. There is no minister for the Pacific anymore and that is certainly something that we will remedy.

**HOST:** Earlier this year the former head of the US Indo Pacific Fleet told Congress that China now controls the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war. Is that true? Has the international community ceded control of the South China Sea to Beijing?

**MARLES:** Well, Admiral Harry Harris is a very big figure in the space of the Pacific and you know what he says demands attention. Certainly, from Australia's point of view we have a strong interest in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea having primacy in the way in which rules work in the South China Sea. That's because the majority of our trade goes through the South China Sea.

I suppose the answer from an Australian perspective is that we need to continually be asserting to China, but to the world, that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea must have primacy and that freedom of navigation, in the sense of the trade that Australia has which passes through the South China Sea, needs to happen in accordance with those rules.

**HOST:** Richard Marles, thank you so much for your time.

**MARLES:** Thanks, Patricia.

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