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**SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE**  
**MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**  
**TELEVISION INTERVIEW**  
**ABC 24**  
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**SUBJECTS:** *News Limited's attack on Bill Shorten's mother; Joe Hockey; ministerial arrangements; China; leaders' debate*

**HOST:** Richard Marles, welcome.

**RICHARD MARLES, SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE:** Thanks, Patricia. Good to be here.

**HOST:** What did you make of the *Daily Telegraph* story on Bill Shorten's mother? Were you offended by it?

**MARLES:** I felt really sorry for Bill as soon as I heard about the story. I've been friends with Bill since we were teenagers and we've been very close over that period of time. I knew Ann Shorten. I knew how proud she was of both Robert and Bill, and perhaps most significantly the dominant role that she played in Bill's life and how Bill would inevitably feel about the way his mother had been treated. I think we saw that in the response that he gave today.

**HOST:** What do you say, then, to the argument made that he brought his mother's story into the campaign and therefore it becomes fair game?

**MARLES:** Look I think Bill has been celebrating his mother's role in his life and part of a campaign is to tell your story as the leader and where you've come from, and obviously what you bring to the nation. People want to get to know their leaders. People want to get to know a prospective prime minister. Inevitably, Bill is going to talk about the person who has been the dominant force in his life and I know how much his mother meant to him, as all mums do, obviously, but Ann Shorten loomed very large in Bill's life. I don't think Bill has done anything other than tell that story, and obviously what we saw this morning was really

a distortion of that and, I think, a really unfair treatment of her and her legacy. I can really understand the reaction that we saw from Bill today, which I think was not really a campaign moment. I think it was just a human moment. I think it was a son really speaking in a heartfelt way about how his mother had been treated.

**HOST:** How about about the, I've heard this argument that what Bill Shorten said was he's, the moment he's won the election. Now, of course Election Day is more than a week away, but is that over-egged? What do you make of that analysis?

**MARLES:** I don't pay much regard to that. If we're looking at the election and we're looking at Bill Shorten's leadership, this is a work in progress that began in 2013, and what we're doing now is the product of the entirety of that time. Bill's leadership has grown over that period of time and in turn is the product of it. So, however we perform in this election is going to be about all those moments and if you're going to reduce it to a single moment that will be on Saturday week in the evening.

But more than that, Patricia, I don't actually think it was a campaign moment today. I think it was a human moment. I just know how Bill would have felt about this. I don't reckon it was about the campaign. I really think it was about how Bill felt about the way a person he loved deeply and mattered so much to him was being treated in the media and not in a way which is fair.

**HOST:** Do you think News Ltd is targeting Labor?

**MARLES:** Look, News Ltd can do what they do. We're not really focused on News Ltd. We're focused on going out there and convincing the Australian people of why we need to change the government; about the fact that three prime ministers in five or six years gives rise to a completely broken government. It is chaos.

We all know in Canberra that they stopped governing a long time ago. I mean, in the defence space they got to this election with the proposition of a fifth defence minister in as many years.

We really need to tell that story, which we are, and we're telling the story about how important it is that we have a properly funded health and education system, and that's what we'll bring if we were to be elected on Saturday week, and we're talking about how we would fund all of that.

We're trying to be - and we are - a serious group of people who are working through the challenges that our nation and our society faces, and we're about trying to explain that to the Australian people, and to be honest News Ltd can do whatever they want.

**HOST:** Were you surprised by reports that Joe Hockey won't seek an extension of his term as ambassador to the United States?

**MARLES:** No. That would be unusual in any circumstance. Ambassadors around the world, in my experience, tend to do their terms and then that's that.

**HOST:** Kevin Rudd has been floated as one possible replacement for Joe Hockey. Would

he make a good ambassador to the United States?

**MARLES:** I think we're getting ahead of ourselves, for somebody in my position, a week and a half out from Election Day, to be talking about those kinds of issues. As I said we have focused on telling the story of what our government would be if we were lucky enough to be elected on 18 May to the Australian people. I think people are interested in issues around health and education as I have described. I don't really think they're interested in who's gonna be the Australian ambassador to whatever country, and to be honest I haven't thought much about any of that and I can't imagine that any of us have.

**HOST:** There were a lot of last-minute appointments just before the election was called. Chris Bowen told me on Radio National Drive that they would be all looked at by Labor. Is that still your position? Are they all going to be under review, all of those last-minute appointments, if you're elected?

**MARLES:** Well certainly the rash of last-minute appointments didn't speak to a government that had much confidence in itself. I mean, if you imagine that you are gonna be governing for a long time you wouldn't have been doing all those appointments at that time, and I think it speaks volumes about where the Coalition's at, where the current government as a group of people are at.

They are in a space where they are literally doing anything and saying anything in order to win an election, but they have stopped governing in any meaningful way a long time ago, and I think that's a very good example of it.

Again, I think all of those things are matters for beyond the 18th. We're just very much focused on the task at hand, which is to talk to the Australian people about what we would offer if we became an Australian government and if we got the faith of the Australian people through the election on 18 May, and how completely and totally broken this chaotic government is, and how patently ridiculous it is to go to an election with three prime ministers in five or six years.

**HOST:** Labor doesn't have a Shadow Minister for Home Affairs. This has been raised by the Home Affairs Minister. Would you like that portfolio if you were to win government? Are you interested in that kind of broad portfolio?

**MARLES:** Firstly, exactly how portfolios are organised after the election is a matter for Bill Shorten if we are to win the election and he becomes the prime minister. That's how we operate. It's for the Labor leader to organise the portfolios and the people who are in them.

For my part I've really enjoyed being the Shadow Minister for Defence. I've felt very committed to that and I would be hopeful and very excited about getting that opportunity in a government and would feel very honoured if that were to occur. But look, at the end of the day that is all a matter for Bill Shorten if we're fortunate enough to win the election on 18 May.

**HOST:** You've said a Labor government would prioritize freedom of navigation through the South China Sea. Should Australia join the US in navigating within 12 nautical miles of the islands claimed by China?

**MARLES:** Look, it's not really possible to answer that question from opposition because the answers to those questions lies in a whole lot of operational details which obviously we don't get access to in opposition.

I think what's important to say and can be said from a place of opposition is the principle here, and the principle is that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is a very important set of the rules of the road, if you like, in that they provide for freedom of navigation. It's a body of water through which most of our trade travels. Now a fair bit of that goes to China itself, of course, but our trade to Japan and South Korea, two of our five largest trading partners, goes through that sea as well. It therefore goes to our national interest and it's really important that we have the courage to assert the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea as being our national interest. We need to be focused on that.

It's also important that we're clear about what we're not interested in and not focused on. I mean, our national interest doesn't lie in the various territorial disputes which are going on within the South China Sea, but we definitely have a national interest in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and we should have the courage to assert that.

**HOST:** China's claim to the islands in the South China Sea has been found to be illegal under international law. Many of those islands contain military bases. Is it Labor's position that China should withdraw from those islands?

**MARLES:** Well, our position is that what we need to assert is the architecture which goes to our national interest, and that's the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea. We should focus our thinking on that, because that is really what underpins the ability for us to have most of our trade pass through the South China Sea, which clearly goes very significantly to our national prosperity.

Now you're right in saying that the International Court of Arbitration has found the artificial islands that have been built by China to be in contravention of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, and that decision has meaning and we've made that clear. So, it is important that in moments such as this we have the courage to assert our national interests, but let me also say this, because it needs to be said in the context of any conversation about China: China is a country with whom we have a really important relationship. They matter to us, and we need to start from a basis of making clear to the Chinese that we deeply value our relationship with them and we want to see that relationship grow. It has been a part of, at least, the long period of economic growth that we have enjoyed over the last few decades, the growth in China. So, it is fundamentally a good thing for Australia.

What comes out of all of that, then, I think is that it's a complex relationship and we need to be really careful and considered and thoughtful in the way in which we navigate it, and what we cannot afford to do as a nation is to do with China gratuitously.

I think that's what we've seen on the part of this government, the Coalition Government, when they've sought to politicise the Chinese relationship in domestic partisan fights in by-elections in Sydney. I mean, it's crazy, and-

**HOST:** -That's an interesting point you make. Have you seen any evidence that this has happened in this campaign?

**MARLES:** Well, I don't think this government has treated the relationship and put it on the plane above the political fray that it clearly deserves. I mean, it is a complex relationship no matter what, but it's one that so deeply matters to Australia and the fundamental position is we value the relationship and we want China to understand that and we want to grow it. We also, in that context, want to be able to have the courage to express our national interest when we see that as differing from Chinese action. I think we can do that in a respectful and mature way and navigate all of those waters, if I can put it that way.

We as a nation can't do that if you walk down a gratuitous path, and I think in the Bennelong by-election, for example, back at the end of 2017, that's exactly what we saw on the part of this Coalition Government. I mean, it was amateur hour and it treated our really critical foreign relations, which are so complex and important and fundamental to our national prosperity and our national security, in a way which clearly undermined what is one of the most important relationships that we have in the world.

**HOST:** Just finally, looking forward to the leader's debate tonight, the final face-off between the two men who want to be prime minister, in what is really the pivotal debate because many Australians will be able to see it because it'll be free to air at the National Press Club, what can we expect from Bill Shorten in this exchange? How important is this for Labor and for Bill Shorten?

**MARLES:** Well I think all the debates have been important and the way in which Bill presents himself in any given moment is critically important. I think the way in which you've characterised the debate tonight is fair. It's a very significant moment.

What you'll see from Bill is firstly a person who is ready. He's ready to become the prime minister of Australia if he's given the opportunity. I think you'll see a person who knows what he wants to do as the prime minister, but also leads a confident and a united team, and is very confident in the way in which he has gone about that.

That will stand in stark contrast to what we've got on the other side, which is a ramshackle bunch of people who can't hang on to a leader for more than a year or two, and that electing or voting for Scott Morrison gives us absolutely no indication as to who will be the who will be the Prime Minister of Australia come the next election. Maybe it's Scott Morrison, maybe it could be Peter Dutton-

**HOST:** I have to actually challenge you on that because they've changed their rules, as have Labor, and in fact the Prime Minister's been making this argument consistently, that because of those rule changes you actually won't get a different leader. You'll have Scott Morrison if you elect him. Are you contesting that?

**MARLES:** The proof is in the eating here, Patricia. Who knows how those rules will actually operate in practice and who knows the way in which will go forward? What I know is that since all of that occurred we've seen another defence minister. We've just talked about how complex the strategic environment is that Australia faces today, and they the way in which they seek to go about navigating Australia through that strategic environment is to put to the Australian people their fifth defence minister in as many years. That is not a confident government which is going to have any kind of continuity of thoughtfulness about how we go about something which is as deeply complex as that, and all that's occurred since we've

got rule changes in the Liberal Party.

I don't have any sense of confidence that what we see now is the kind of Liberal Party that we will see in three years' time - or for that matter in a year's time, because they are on such a high churn rate who the hell would know?

What I do know is this: Bill Shorten leads an absolutely united team and we've gone to this election with as comprehensive a policy agenda as I think any opposition has presented to the Australian people.

That's another point that Bill will make very clearly tonight. We've not been shy about what we would seek to do as a government if given the opportunity. In contrast you don't see any of that from Scott Morrison and the Liberals because they have stopped governing. They literally have nothing to say other than to run a scare campaign.

What you can be guaranteed on tonight is it'll be about Labor's agenda. Bill will be talking about what we're offering the Australian people, and Scott Morrison will be doing everything he can to run a scare campaign about it.

**HOST:** Richard Marles, thanks for joining us.

**MARLES:** Thanks, Patricia.

***ENDS***

**Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.**