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DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY  
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&EO TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
ABC 24 - AFTERNOON BRIEFING  
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***SUBJECTS: AUSMIN; US Missile; Oil supply; Darwin Port.***

**PATRICIA KARVELAS:** I want to bring in the Deputy Labor Leader and Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles on that to hear what Labor's view is. Richard Marles, welcome.

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** Good afternoon Patricia. How are you?

**KARVELAS:** I'm well. Defence Minister, Linda Reynolds told me this morning on RN Breakfast the United States made no request and is not actively making any requests to base American missiles on Australian soil. What do you make of the news? Do you see this as now dead or is this, does this still have life? If at some point they make that request?

**MARLES:** I don't think this is on the agenda. I heard Linda Reynolds' comments this morning. And she was pretty clear. It certainly reflected the conversations we had with Secretary Esper this morning. And so I don't think this is on the agenda. Ultimately, I think a lot was read into a few comments that the Defence Secretary made in relation to a very general question. I don't think there's a proposal at all to base missiles in Australia.

**KARVELAS:** Let's talk about what Secretary Esper said to you. Did you talk about this issue? Did you ask questions about whether this request may be made at some point?

**MARLES:** Yes, we sought clarification. But what was said was consistent with the comments that Defence Minister Reynolds made, and it was clear to us this was not something that is on the agenda.

**KARVELAS:** What clarification was provided?

**MARLES:** As I said, this is not a proposal - this is not a request that's being made of Australia. This is not a proposition which is on the agenda. I think Linda Reynolds was perfectly clear on that this morning and that reflects the conversations we had as well.

**KARVELAS:** Did you ascertain where else they may be placed in our region?

**MARLES:** We didn't go into that. I mean, I think the point here is that this was a very general response to a very general question and without time frames, really, without definite time frames being provided. I don't think this is a proposition that is imminent and it's not something which has been made to Australia from the US.

**KARVELAS:** Okay. Do you think you can you say categorically that you think this should never happen, that Australia should never host missiles like this?

**MARLES:** This is not a proposition which is on the table.

**KARVELAS:** I'm asking you for something a bit bigger than that. Do you think it should never be on the table?

**MARLES:** And in a sense, you never know what circumstances we're going to face 20, 30, 40 years from now - and that's the context in which you ask the question. The only way you can answer these right now is what are we faced with, here and now? We're not faced with a request. This is not on the agenda and it couldn't be clearer.

**KARVELAS:** Are you concerned about the militarisation of the region?

**MARLES:** I am. I definitely am. It forms part of the strategic environment that we face and the challenging nature of it. And obviously, you know, we would want in Australia's national interests to see a de-escalation in relation to the competition that exists between the great powers. But it is a part of the reality of the strategic circumstances that we face. And I think what we take from this is that in order for Australia to manage our way through this, we need to grow the leadership side of our international personality. We need to play bigger and we need to have a bigger voice within the alliance and seek that and I think the Americans want that. And, we need to play a bigger role within our

region and in global affairs because these are challenging strategic circumstances and we need to be shaping them to the extent we can and that is not to overstate our abilities there. There are plenty of things we can have no control over, but there's lots that we can and we need to.

**KARVELAS:** So, in the wake of these AUSMIN talks, has Australia flexed its muscle to the extent that Australia should've, in these talks. Are you satisfied with the role that Australia has played?

**MARLES:** Look, I don't like the phrase "flexing muscles," I think it is about ...

**KARVELAS:** You can use your own phrase, but you know what I'm saying.

**MARLES:** Well I think there are differences here because I don't think it's about muscling up. I think it's playing the biggest role that we can and often that is not in a military context, often that's trying to be as constructive a neighbour for example, within the Pacific. I have long argued we should be doing much more in that respect and I think we do need to be doing more. I think we need be having a plan in respect of our region, for example, the Pacific, where we do seek to work with the countries of the Pacific about improving the prosperity of the 10 million people who live in that region given that this is the community which fared worst against the millennium development goals. And that has got something to do with us. That is not about muscling up, it is about playing our part. I think that it is really important that we play bigger. You don't do that over one weekend or in respect of one meeting. I think it is really important that we find that leadership side of our international personality right now, because you know, going to that bigger picture that you described, and you asked the question about concerns of the militarisation of the region, all of this speaks to very challenging strategic circumstances that we face and so we need to play a bigger role.

**KARVELAS:** Secretary Pompeo says allies and nations don't need to choose between the US and China. But he also said you can sell your soul for a pile of soybeans, or you can protect your people. What do you make of that, of that characterisation?

**MARLES:** The Secretary's put that in a colourful way. But I think it goes to what I have just described. There is strategic competition between the great powers in our region. And that makes it challenging for Australia. And we are not going to be able to manage our way through this, unless we grow that leadership side of our international personality. But I'd also make the point whilst there is that competition, we've got to find room for co-operation as well. This is not the Cold War. We have a very large economic engagement with China, a very critical economic engagement with China, which has been profoundly beneficial to

Australia. But of course America also has a very significant economic engagement with China as well, which has been important for its prosperity. These are very different circumstances to what existed during the Cold War. Now, our alliance with the United States, the shared values that go with it and particularly in respect upholding a global rules based order are as relevant and as important today as they have ever been, and that remains at the core of our world view. But from that place, I think it's really important that Australia seeks to build the best political relationship that we possibly can with China. And we should be actively seeking to do that.

**KARVELAS:** Defence Minister Linda Reynolds seemed to link the possible deployment of an Australian warship to a deal that Australia is seeking to finalise with the US on petroleum reserves, as you know. Does that make sense to you? Is that fair enough to link them?

**MARLES:** I'm not aware of exactly how that has been put. But there are a couple of issues in the question that you have just asked. Our petroleum reserves are very small and it's a big issue for this country. It goes to the heart of our national security and it is a problem that this Government needs to resolve. It is a deep problem that this Government needs to resolve and we have heard very little at all from them about how they seek to deal with this, and the fact we do not meet international standards in terms of the level of our fuel reserves. So that is on its own a discrete issue which this Government needs to find an answer to. I think in terms of what other requests that are made of Australia, we actually need to get clarity from our own Government about that specifics of whatever requests may or may not have been made, and assess it accordingly.

**KARVELAS:** Yes, on those calls, you have said it depends on the specific proposal. So what would be a reasonable and justifiable request for Australia in your view?

**MARLES:** It's not for me to articulate that, I think it is actually for the Government to provide clarity about what they intend to do if indeed a specific request has been made and how they seek to meet it. I'm mindful of the comments that the Prime Minister has made today and I broadly agree with what he said. I would make the point that Freedom of Navigation and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea are very important issues in terms of Australia's national interests, being an island trading nation. Protecting shipping is something which very much matters to Australia. Now, having said that, what our attitude would be in relation to any given request, we actually need to see what the specifics of that request are because one thing I'm really clear of is in issues such as these is that the detail matters.

**KARVELAS:** The detail does matter. Bob Carr was of course the Foreign Minister in a Labor Government. He said while some in the US Administration pitch this as Freedom of Navigation; what you just talked about. There are others working to turn this into yet another regime change war in the Middle East. He talked about John Bolton, for instance, the President's National Security Advisor. Is that a concern or a factor for you? Do you agree with Bob Carr?

**MARLES:** I think it's really important that we keep issues separate here. And that we are very clear about where our national interests lie. Our national interests lie in relation to the Convention on the Law of the Sea and asserting it and our interests lie in Freedom of Navigation. It matters that waterways have Freedom of Navigation ...

**KARVELAS:** So does that mean you don't see this as about regime change? You're not worried this is a regime change exercise?

**MARLES:** That cannot be part of, or ought not be part of, a request the Australian Government goes to. And I actually think the Prime Minister was pretty clear on that today. If what we're talking about here, but again, this is why we need to get clarity from the Government on what is actually being proposed, in the terms on what is being proposed; if what is being proposed is assistance in relation to safe shipping, well, then, we can understand it in those terms and from there, we need to get the specifics of what the actual ask is, if an ask is being made. Right now we need to get that clarity from the Government.

**KARVELAS:** Labor MP, Nick Champion has called for the controversial Chinese lease on the Darwin Port to be scrapped so it can be placed back in Australian Government control. Is that something Labor should consider? And, before you tell me he is a backbencher, he is the Deputy Chair of your Foreign Policy - the Committee of the Parliament looking into this. He can't be dismissed. Is it something Labor will consider?

**MARLES:** Well, I tell you the last thing I would do is dismiss Nick Champion. I have known Nick a long time and that would be a grave mistake. I understand the point that Nick's making. And we opposed the sale to Landbridge when this occurred a number of years ago and we raised our concerns at the time about the ownership of the Port of Darwin being in Chinese hands and the basis of this. I absolutely get why this point is being made. I think we do need to be careful going forward about considering issues of sovereign risk. But ultimately, this is a matter again for the Government. And what they need to be doing is providing an assurance to the Australian people that this particularly lease holding does not give rise to any compromising of our national security. And that's a confidence and an assurance which I think that the Government so far

has failed to provide.

**KARVELAS:** If the Government has failed to provide it, does that mean, do you think the position you have on this should be revisited? If you can't get a confident view that this Darwin Port is safe, in your view, from these risks, should it be revisited?

**MARLES:** I also made the point that given this has now occurred; there will be issues of sovereign risk entailed in this going forward. What we actually need to hear from the Government is that assurance, that sense of confidence, that this lease holding does not give rise to any compromising of our national security. That's exactly what we need to hear from the Government about.

**KARVELAS:** Richard Marles, thank you so much for joining us this afternoon.

**MARLES:** Thanks, Patricia.

***ENDS***

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.