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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
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DAVID SPEERS: Joining us is Shadow Defence Minister and Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. Thanks for joining us this morning, Richard Marles. There has been a lot of debate this past week about China. How would you describe the challenge that China poses?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Our relationship with China is a very complex question. There's no doubt that the growth in China and the rise of China has been hugely beneficial to Australia and to our economy, and you cited some stats in your opening which go to that point. But China is also as a rising power becoming more assertive and doing what great powers do and that's seeking to shape the world around it. And in a sense reshape elements of the global rules based order which has served the world- but Australia- so well since the Second World War. It's really in respect of that that it presents some challenging questions for Australia. And so, they're the questions we need to work through.

SPEERS: Well let's just go to that. I mean, you say China is becoming more assertive it has great powers but is it more concerning than that? I mean, do you consider China's activities through Confucius Institutes, through Australian universities, through its business interests, through what it's doing in the Pacific with big investments there. Is this all entirely benign?

MARLES: I think China is seeking to assert itself in the world. I think it's trying to assert itself in our region of the world. And that does present challenges for us and it's very important that we have a standing in the world and a confidence about ourselves which enables us to have the courage to speak our mind and assert our national interests when that may differ from Chinese action. And actually that's really the challenge going forward for Australia, which is to develop and grow the leadership side of our international personality. And I think that's something that we have not historically been particularly good at and we need to be better at it going forward.

SPEERS: Moreover, I'm keen to just tease that out. But when it comes to China; inserting or expressing its assertiveness in the region, is it more than that? Do you think President Xi Jinping wants to see capitalism eclipsed? This is what Andrew Hastie wrote during the week.

MARLES: That is not clear to me. And you know, I understand what Andrew Hastie wrote, and I understand the points he was making. There was obviously a comparison in that piece which was incendiary. And I understand the reaction from China in relation to it. You know, I think what all of that commentary highlights is how important it is for Australia to actually develop a consistent and settled and detailed position in relation to China. And you were right in your introduction, that's a complex thing to do but it's a thing that we must do. And right now it's to state the obvious that the Government's kind of all over the place. But it's also true that if we're going to develop that kind of settled position there needs to be actually a much better discussion between the Government and the Opposition in relation to this because it's not a settled position in respect to the next three years, we're going to have a settled position going forward over the next few decades and that does require bipartisanship- and we can do it. I don't think there is a particularly partisan difference in respect of this- but there is a conversation that needs to be had. It has to be led by the Government and up until now that's not been occurring.

SPEERS: Well this is an interesting point. What would that look like this sort of strategic statement of Australian identity in a bipartisan way? What would that need to include?

MARLES: There has to actually be a detailed conversation between the Government and the Opposition. It must be led by the Government of the day. The Government is in control of the sources of advice from our agencies and from our departments. But it's important to understand that that source of advice is critical in terms of us reaching a central position, but it's never going to give a gift wrapped answer to any Government of the day because departments and agencies talk to Governments on a three year term- on a three year basis. And this is just a bigger, longer, more difficult issue than that. And so it's actually important that politicians on both sides of the fence kind of take control of this; provide leadership to our agencies and our departments and seek from them a settled answer going forward. I think the thing here David, is there is a certain bipolarity in the way in which we have gone about our relationship with China. And I've really seen this in the roles that I've held. On the one hand in our economic relationship with China, it is extremely positive and as a former Trade Minister who was involved in the negotiation of the China Free Trade Agreement, I know how important our economic relationship with China means to the prosperity of so many Australians. On the other hand, in a Defence context, in a Foreign Affairs context, I've also seen a legitimate anxiety which exists in respect of China seeking to shape the world around it- which I don't judge China for doing. But it does raise questions which on occasions go against what is Australia's national interest. Now, how you reconcile that bipolarity is a real question and I don't actually think as a nation we have done that and I think we do need a different architecture if we are going to do it.

SPEERS: Let me just come back to what you're suggesting this morning; in this sort of bipartisan architecture. You are talking about a statement that lays out where Australia stands in relation to its relationship with China. And its own interests in the world

MARLES: That, but I actually think it's a bit more than that because it's got to be an

evolving statement, if you like, over the journey. So it's not just a settled position but it's an architecture which enables that position going forward. And that must be led by the Government of the day and it hasn't been. Now you know to be fair, I had a meeting with Linda Reynolds-

SPEERS: Give us a sense of what you would like to see in that sort of statement when it comes to China specifically. Are you talking about red lines? Are you talking about...

MARLES: I don't have all the answers and I'm not here pretending to have all the answers. But I suppose at its most fundamental what there needs to be is a much better reconciliation of the two sides of our relationship with China. Which I think during the course of the last six years have not been reconciled. I think both in terms of how we reconcile the security anxieties that we may have in respect of China with all the obvious economic interaction with it. That needs to be reconciled. And it needs to be done in a sober way. And it also needs to be done in a way which acknowledges that there isn't a Cold War going on here. China is not the Soviet Union. There will be issues in respect of human rights that we raised with China from time to time and it's important that we can have the courage to do that. But it's also important to note- and this is a really critical point, David- that China has been responsible for the single biggest alleviation of poverty in human history and that forms part of, if you like, the Human Rights judgment that we make of China as well. All of that needs to be reconciled into a settled position which I don't think we have seen from this Government. But I don't think you're going to get it from any Government, unless there is actually a different architecture of discussion between the major parties going forward and that's really critical.

SPEERS: Let me ask you a couple of specifics. Do you think Australia should be deepening its military ties with the United States?

MARLES: Well I think our military ties are very deep with the United States.

SPEERS: Are they deep enough?

MARLES: Well they are as deep as any relationship- I actually think the United States has with any country. They're certainly the deepest military relationship that Australia has with any country in our home.

SPEERS: Given what's going on in the region, given the strength of China, given the assertiveness it's expressing, that you point to; do we need to deepen our military ties with the US further?

MARLES: Our alliance with the United States is as significant and as relevant today as it has ever been. I absolutely believe that. Because what underpins our relationship with United States- and our alliance with the United States- is a sense of shared values. That's the phrase we talk a lot about; democracy, the rule of law-

SPEERS: And I appreciate all of that but let me ask you this; do you think we should for example have U.S. missiles based on Australian soils

MARLES: Well, I wondered whether that was the question that you were trying to get to. I don't actually think that was a question that was being put forward by-

SPEERS: No. But do you think we should consider-

MARLES: During the course of the last weekend. Well it's not- it's not a proposition which is on the table. It's not one which actually makes sense to me in terms of what America may or may not want to do.

SPEERS: The idea it could be missiles, US bombers or drones; where do you stand on whether we do need more American hardware as well as personnel on our soil?

MARLES: Well I just want to make it really clear in relation to the question of the intermediate range missiles: we're actually a fair way, even the northern part of Australia is a fair way from China. That was not a request which was made and I don't believe that it was even a flag that was run up the flagpole. It was not on the agenda at all.

SPEERS: But it would be naive Richard Marles, to think the US won't be asking at some point through the missiles, bombers, drones or more marines to be based here.

MARLES: We were a part of- the former Labor Government was a part of establishing the Marine rotation in Darwin and we've been an advocate, I might say, over the last six years in Opposition of the Government getting on with making sure that that marine rotation is brought to the extent of the aspiration which was originally held for it under the Gillard Government. So we have been a supporter of that. And I've made it really clear over a long period of time that the greater the American presence in the East Asian time zone the better. The part of what we need to be doing in terms of our moving forward is to- and seeking to shape the circumstances that we find is to be encouraging America to stay in the East Asian time zone. And actually, I think the most important thing we need to do there is sharing the burden of strategic thought which will only occur if we do grow that leadership side of our national personality, particularly in places like the Pacific. But deepening our Defence relationship with America is obviously a good thing. And none of that is new. Our alliance with the United States goes back to 1942 and it has been the cornerstone of our national security and very central to our world view- and that continues to be the case. The point I was wanting to make earlier is; when the global rules based order is seeking to be reshaped which has been so important in terms of Australian prosperity, it is actually America which has largely under written that rules based order since the Second World War, which is why an alliance with them right now, is as relevant today as it has ever been.

SPEERS: Can I just turn to Iran briefly. The Government still hasn't announced a decision on whether Australia will join patrols in the Strait of Hormuz, to protect commercial shipping there. Have you been briefed yet on the options the Government is contemplating?

MARLES: No.

SPEERS: Okay. Well is there a case in your view to send either a frigate or a surveillance plane?

MARLES: It would be nice to get a detailed briefing from the Government about what proposition is looking at being considered here. Whether a specific request has been made and whether a specific proposition is going to be put forward and I very much hope that we

will get that briefing from the government and we will be brought into the loop, if you like, by the Government before all that becomes public. The detail here matters. And in terms of our support or otherwise for any proposition, it's impossible to consider that in the context of not having that detail. So we really would like to get that. Having said that, let me make the principal point that freedom of navigation, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is completely central to Australia's national interest. We are an island trading nation. So much of our economy is based on sea trade and the rules that apply to that could not be more fundamental to our national interests.

SPEERS: The final one, Richard Marles. This conservative political action conference, it's been underway in Sydney this weekend. Kristina Keneally, your colleague who's been a favourite target of the speakers there. She of course argued that one of them should not be granted a visa to enter Australia and so they've been having a few goes at her at this conference. At one point there was a brief chant of 'send her back', apparently in reference to Senator Keneally's American heritage. What have you made of this gathering? Does it worry you at all?

MARLES: I think that chant says everything about the thoughtfulness or lack of it which is going on at that conference. I mean this is an imported extremism which is going on here, and that chant is an example of it because it of course echoes a chant that was being made in America, in respect to a number of members of Congress in the last few days. Now, the idea that presumably Kristina Keneally is going to be sent back home; those at the conference were referring to that home being America. So there's a certain irony in that. But the idea that we have this kind of imported extremism in Australia, there really is no place for it in our country. It's not what Australia is about. I think ultimately it's a question of leadership for the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison. Is he going to disassociate himself from this group and this conference in circumstances where Government MPs have been attending it and where the Menzies Foundation has been connected to it? We really need to hear from the Prime Minister, pretty quickly I think.

SPEERS: Alright, Deputy Labor Leader and Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles thanks for joining us this morning.

MARLES: Thanks, David.

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Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.