

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
RADIO INTERVIEW
3AW - NEIL MITCHELL
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SUBJECT/S: China.

NEIL MITCHELL: I think Labor's come up with a good idea- a joint approach, a unified approach on China involving both sides of the parliament. For heaven's sake, if you can't unify on something like this, you can't unify on anything. On the line, Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. Good morning.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Good morning Neil. How are you?

MITCHELL: I'm ok. Do you agree if this man is sent home, he is dead?

MARLES: Well, I certainly think that he has now claimed asylum which means that our rule of law has to apply here. So his claims obviously have to be tested through our processes. And the basis on which people are given asylum is whether they will be the subject of persecution if they return back to where they've come. And obviously that's what's got to be considered in the context of assessing his asylum claim.

MITCHELL: So the fact that his life could be on the line is relevant.

MARLES: It's absolutely relevant. And the point here is; we are a rule of law country. So this is not a simple matter. But conceptually it's simple; he's made a claim for asylum. There's a process to go, that process must now be gone through and Australian law should apply here.

MITCHELL: Now, what's your idea about a joint approach? How do you do it?

MARLES: Well I think right now, I'm struggling to see a guiding philosophy which underpins this Government's relationship to China- Australia's relationship to China. And I think part of that- and

it's complicated to be fair and you summed it up I think pretty well in your introduction. I think one of the issues here is that the quality of the conversation between Labor and Liberal on this is not good. I mean, I basically think there is a sense of bipartisanship out there. I don't think there's anything or any particular issue which separates us from this. But we actually need to have the conversation. We need to have at a high level- I think at a cabinet level and we need to do it so that it's not just a matter of a broad bipartisanship but it's actually a sort of granular sense of bipartisanship which says to the public service; right, you now need to give us advice not based on the next two or three years on the length of this government but you have in front of you a view which is of the major parties which will survive for quite some time. We need advice over the next 10-20 years because it's over that period of time that China and other countries in the region are determining their strategic policy.

MITCHELL: So what do you do? You set up a joint committee on both sides to observe one's own kitchen cabinet. What do you do?

MARLES: Well look I think that the detail of this- I mean firstly this has to be led by the Government-

MITCHELL: You have floated it, it's your idea.

MARLES: Yes, but ultimately it has to be led by the government. There is an idea- a sense in which they are the decision makers and so it's the degree to which they want to bring- you know- the other major party into the room. But I think that a way forward is not to- it's not a kitchen cabinet, I don't think it's about decision making, I think that the government of the day are the makers of decisions, whether they should be operating the National Security Committee, they obviously operate the Cabinet but I think there is an ability to have a much better conversation with which determines that- I hate this word but for want of a better word- sort of a doctrine, if you like which looks at the way in which what is our guiding philosophy in terms of how we approach China.

MITCHELL: You were in China recently, in September I think and you said it would be a mistake- a profound mistake to view Beijing as an enemy. Now our security agencies say they're hacking into us with these claims they are trying to pervert our parliament. There is the way they've gone to concentration camps for the Uighurs. Quite apart from holding an Australian citizen effectively without charge. Why should they not be viewed as an enemy and what are they if they're not?

MARLES: Well it's a really complicated relationship is the answer to that question and again your summary at the start of this segment, I thought, set it out nicely. Whatever else they are, they're our largest trading partner and there are thousands of jobs in this state which are dependent upon the relationship with China- jobs and things like dairy and we owe it to all of those Australians and the people dependent upon them to make sure that we get this right. So we deeply engage with China right now at an economic level. And so I don't think we're talking about- there's not the Soviet Union, this is not the period of the Cold War where there was a complete economic separation. But it is complicated and you know, there are human rights issues with the Uighurs, and it's important that we, in whatever relationship we have with China, we're able to express that and I did that when I was in Beijing. And it's also important that we're able to stand up, we have the courage to be able to stand up for our national interests when that differs from Chinese actions.

MITCHELL: So if they have been hacking into our Parliament and attempting to infiltrate it by

putting a spy on the floor of the House of Representatives- if that's not a Cold War what is?

MARLES: Well, firstly in respect of the allegation to that; it is unquestionably serious. And the fact that ASIO have come out and issued a very rare statement which they have, only underscores how significant these allegations are. I think it's actually really important that we're hearing from the Prime Minister as soon as possible- both about these allegations but to give the Australian people a sense of assurance that- you know- we do operate a democracy which is free from foreign interference- I believe that we do by the way- but I just think it's very important that the Prime Minister make that statement. But it's precisely because of the difficulties of this kind, that we actually need to have a plan. What is the plan with China? What is the overriding philosophy which details how we operate with China?

MITCHELL: One of the men allegedly embroiled in this, and trying to set up the infiltration is a promoter of 'Belt and Road' which your Victorian Government has signed up to- the only state in the country to sign up to it. Should we get out of 'Belt and Road', in Victoria?

MARLES: Well ultimately, it's a matter for national governments to engage in these matters. I mean, my view about this is that there may be specific infrastructure projects which is what Belt and Road is, that are in Australia's interests. But it's something that we need to approach with, I think, a degree of caution.

MITCHELL: You did say when you were away that you thought- when you're in China- that we needed to increase military cooperation. Do you stand by that?

MARLES: I do. And that may sound counterintuitive but right now there are military exercises that we engage in with China. They're largely about building trust. In fact one of the things that we need to be doing is from whatever base, no matter how low it is, to be building whatever trust we can with China, and the military is one area where there actually are relationships and I think there is room to do more of those trust building exercises between the Australian Defence Force and the Chinese military and people should understand that is happening right now. And that's a good thing-

MITCHELL: But I can't see why we should trust China on this.

MARLES: We're engaging with China whether people like it, or not. And we have a deep economic engagement with them. So long as that is the case, the more trust that play the better. And I'm not saying that blind trust here. We need to be walking forward with our eyes completely open. But it's to state the obvious that in circumstances where we're engaging, the better we can make the relationship, the better that is in terms of our national interests. And unless we're at a point where we are about to cut it off- and we're not at that point- then we need to be working on that.

MITCHELL: Thank you very much Richard Marles Labor's Defence Spokesman, Deputy Leader of the Party, too.

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Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.