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LYNDAL CURTIS: One of those off finding facts on an overseas tour is the Deputy Opposition Leader, Richard Marles who is in the Middle East. Mr Marles, welcome to ABC drive. Where are you? And what are you doing?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: I'm in Bahrain, Lyndal. I'm surprised to hear that you think Canberra is a better place without Parliament sitting, I always assumed that that's where all the action happened and Canberrans loved us being around but there you go.

CURTIS: I've got some news for you.

MARLES: Fair enough. Well I'm in Bahrain at the moment and which is at the end of a three country tour of the Middle East where I was involved in a conference in Israel but also here in Bahrain. And earlier in Cyprus having been visiting Australian deployments, which are ones that are not as frequently visited. So it's been an interesting experience for me to see what those Australians are doing in their service and they certainly do our country proud

CURTIS: Now, not so long ago the tensions between the US and Iran caused quite some concern about the Straits of Hormuz. Last month the US sent a carrier aircraft through those Straits. From what you have been able to see have those tensions eased?

MARLES: Well I'm actually about to get the briefing during the day today and it's first thing in the morning here in Bahrain. But I think there is no doubt that putting in place this force has created a greater sense of calm within the region and that was certainly the intent from the

outset- that being able to make sure that there was safe passage being provided to commercial vessels through the Straits of Hormuz would actually ultimately reduce the opportunity for anybody else to interfere with that- and in turn that reduces tensions and I hope that that's what's being seen.

CURTIS: Now, you say you're visiting Australians- Australian- deployments that aren't necessarily kind of front of mind. Australia does quite a lot in the Middle East. Have we got the balance right between what we do in the Middle East which is still an important region particularly for tensions or particularly for trade but also our own region which is very important for trade?

MARLES: Sure it's a good question to ask and the honest answer that question is that it's one that needs to be constantly appraised and reassessed. There are challenges in the Middle East and Australia but I think it's important that Australia is one of those group of countries which are willing to help when other nations put their hands up and ask for help and that's what has happened in Iraq, for example. And we have participated here in Bahrain and the combined maritime task force for many years which has been dealing with a range of issues around the coast of the Horn of Africa; issues around piracy, smuggling of drugs and the like. And so you know it's important that we're making that contribution. It's important that those contributions are sustainable within the context of what Australia has to offer and what our capability is. I think our current commitments are sustainable but it's also obvious to make the point that we are facing a lot of challenges at home. And we need to be making sure that over the coming decade we are able to make sure that we can have our- do what needs to be done within our region.

CURTIS: One of the things that has happened. Both in our region, in fact in our own country Australia but also happened recently in the United Kingdom is that it's not been the best year for Labour Parties on both continents. Are there lessons that you have drawn from what happened in the UK? Are there parallels between what happened in the UK and the Australian elections?

MARLES: Well I think what Labor put to the election in Australia back in May is a very different proposition I think to what was put forward by Jeremy Corbyn in the recent British election. So I think we need to be careful about drawing comparisons and certainly we went through a very exhaustive process of reviewing what occurred in May where we got things right, and obviously where we got things wrong and clearly we've got a number of things wrong- and we ended up with the result that none of us wanted. And one of those lessons was the need to have a very clear narrative with perhaps a less broad- it can be bold but a less broad- policy agenda which is able to be explained to the people. I think that's a critical lesson that we will take out of the election and the review of the election isn't take going forward.

CURTIS: It's the common thing though, the need to choose a leader who is acceptable to the public?

MARLES: Look this has been- I'm not going to comment about Jeremy Corbyn- I'm not there. In terms of Bill Shorten's leadership; that's something which has been was examined a lot in the context of the review. I've made the point that I think we could have won the election with Bill. I think there are a range of issues that went to our result back in May, and they are very clearly addressed in the review. From our point of view though what's really

important is we've gone over this exercise. We've examined it thoroughly, we haven't pulled any punches. We've learnt what we needed to do coming out of the election and we are very keen to now, I guess over the Christmas break, put this in the rear-view mirror and start focusing on the future.

CURTIS: Is there though a broader discussion for progressive parties, one that's gone on in Australia, is happening the UK and it's also happening with the Democrats in the U.S. about how progressive you are or how centrist you are, where you have to pitch yourself to be electorally popular?

MARLES: Of course and but that's not a discussion that's recent, I mean you can trace that discussion back to John Curtin, and you know, you look through his evolution as a political figure and he was wrestling with exactly these issues back in the in the 30s and 40s. So, I think this is the enduring question for progressive parties about how you, and how you place yourself and what message you put forward in order to win government because you don't achieve anything from Opposition and winning government is fundamentally important. So, you know they are issues that we constantly wrestle with. I think it's important though as well to understand what are the critical needs of our constituency? Like the people who would have traditionally voted Labor, who would want to vote Labor again. And I think what's clear coming out of our election. And what was clearly stated in the review is that you need a couple of licences to win federal elections; one is on national security but the other is on the economy. And on our own people, people who are traditional Labor voters, want to know that Labor will be a safe pair of hands when it comes to the economy and we've got to make sure that we are that going forward and we certainly intend to be.

CURTIS: And finally; this year did you step up into a leadership position, have you enjoyed it?

MARLES: I have enjoyed it. I mean it's obviously been a challenging period to be involved in the leadership of the Party at a period where we've suffered significant election loss- one that we didn't expect. There's obviously an enormous amount of grief associated with that and people have been working through it. And none of that has been easy. But that said, I've really enjoyed the challenge, I've loved working with Anthony Albanese and the rest of the leadership team. And I think you know we've come through this period. And it's I think amazing is that we've got to the end of the year with a spring in our step and we're all pretty excited actually about looking forward to next year.

CURTIS: Well Richard Marles we'll have to leave it there. Thank you very much for your time.

MARLES: It's a pleasure.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.