

Submission – Opportunities for strengthening Australia's relations with the Republic of France

There are references from the 1800s, describing how “France protects her citizens”. This is an intrinsic part of French identity. It should also be part of ours, as a nation with self respect. The demonstration of such values alone would boost diplomacy between such like minded nations.

In the 1881 publication *South sea massacres*, it was said “But we seldom hear of a Frenchman being killed. Why? Because France protects her citizens.”



<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/12431601?q&versionId=14688159+33370358+264714430+264915438>

However even earlier in 1849, important clarification was provided by prominent French politician Monsieur Guizot, who said (published in *Archivo americano y espíritu de la prensa del mundo*) that “When France protects her citizens in all countries where they may reside, this does not mean that she will make war on all powers that may enter into war with these countries.”

https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Archivo_americano_y_esp%C3%AADritu_de_la_pren.html?id=EIJOAQAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y

Now, it is important to say that any criticism stated or implied in this submission is not intended to be partisan in any way. I use recent examples solely because links to news articles and the like are easier to find. However I make my statements in regards to Australia's history and record in general, hoping like all Australians to make our community the best it can be.

One situation where Australia could improve our future record in protecting our own citizens would be that if our citizens are being held in a prison where it is known they are being tortured, without being charged with any crime, then we make an effort (at all, let alone the highest possible effort) to bring them home, whether it be high level diplomacy or whatever. The AG website states that “A person must not be removed from Australia to another country if there is a real risk that the person may suffer torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in that other country.”

<https://www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/HumanRights/Human-rights-scrutiny/PublicSectorGuidanceSheets/Pages/Prohibitionontortureandcruelinhumanordegradingtreatmentorpunishment.aspx>

This is agnostic of the circumstances which could lead to the capture or torture, and in practice it is surely implied we must do everything we can do to rescue citizens being tortured in other nations.

Another recent situation is that of an Australian citizen where there is currently a highly reasonable suspicion that if he is extradited to the USA, he will die. There is no reason to think he wouldn't, and certainly no practical guarantee this would not occur. Australia's view on the death penalty is supposedly that “Australia opposes the death penalty in all circumstances for all people.”

<https://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/Pages/australias-strategy-for-abolition-of-the-death-penalty.aspx>

Given this is absolute, Australia would be able to demonstrate protection of our citizens by pursuing the best available diplomatic channels to bring a citizen in these circumstances home. Again I make no value judgement as to the circumstances of why he is where he is, what I am mentioning here is a question of protecting our citizens in line with the values we say we have, and/or should have. Further to this, there are and have been ongoing question marks about the health of this citizen. Nothing that Australia is a signatory to the "right to health" principle, Australia should be doing whatever it can to ensure the right to health is preserved for our citizens.

<https://www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/HumanRights/Human-rights-scrutiny/PublicSectorGuidanceSheets/Pages/Righttohealth.aspx>

Yet, what we have had is apathy and disowning of our citizen from both major sides of politics.

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/julian-assange-s-case-special-no-point-pretending-otherwise>

The most prominent recent case of Australia needing to protect citizens is evacuating citizens from areas where the so-called novel coronavirus is out of control. The original position of DFAT and the government was that citizens would need to open their chequebook prior to being helped to come home.

<https://amp.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australians-will-need-to-pay-1000-to-be-evacuated-from-wuhan-20200130-p53w71.html>

<https://amp.abc.net.au/article/11913304>

Under this scheme, stranded citizens would have had to pay \$1000 for the privilege of spending two weeks isolated on Christmas Island, prior to having to fund their way home from Perth. DFAT even stated that it is standard for citizens to make a contribution to their repatriation. Well they already have! It's called taxes. If taxes are for anything, they are for protecting our citizens whenever and wherever they need it. What's more, the evacuations were slow compared to Japan and the USA, whether this be through poor diplomacy or a laissez-faire attitude, again not taking all measures to protect our citizens. Furthermore, DFAT advised stranded citizens they needed to make their own way to Wuhan, which was under lockdown. Advice about as useful as being told to get a hat while falling into a volcano. Not a particularly good reflection on our national identity.

Even China itself stated that it would take all measures possible to protect Australians in Wuhan!

<https://amp.abc.net.au/article/11913304>

And then, during the height of the crisis when located in China, we were told "Australians should not rely on further assisted departure from Wuhan or mainland China..." Actually, whatever assistance is needed is *exactly* what Australians should be able to rely on. Other countries continued to carry out evacuations including the USA, New Zealand and Singapore. The Singaporean foreign minister said they "will not leave" any Singaporean behind. To the Australian authorities that be, I simply say: try harder!

Of course, the response from France and the EU was different. It resembles orderly competence.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200128-chinese-tourist-in-serious-condition-in-france-s-fourth-coronavirus-case>

<https://amp.abc.net.au/article/11902006>

Even now, we see as Australia closes its borders, the failure to even provide meaningful information to Australians stranded abroad, let alone providing meaningful assistance to come home. For an Australian citizen to say "I feel completely on my own" is a disgrace. And whenever we do make efforts to rescue Australians from Wuhan, South America or whatever, why must it come across as being through gritted teeth.

<https://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-19/coronavirus-traps-australians-overseas-amid-dfat-warnings/12067020>

On a separate matter, we see the true wisdom of Monsieur Guizot's protective but not warmongering words. In response to the downing of MH17, we had Australia's PM engage in primary school level cap gun diplomacy against a major nation (which of course achieved nothing constructive). On the other hand, Dutch foreign minister Frans Timmermans engaged in true diplomacy: "For the Netherlands, one priority clearly stands out above all others: bring the victims remains home."

<https://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-14/shirtfront-tony-abbott-vladimir-putin-g20/5811502>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/fragment/hole-heart-netherlands>

A further example of this errant diplomacy resulted in two Australians receiving their punishment in the death penalty at ANZAC Day. Make no mistake, this timing would have been no coincidence, a direct statement from Indonesia to the relevant Australian authorities.

<https://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-27/bali-nine-indonesia-ignored-anzac-day-plea/6423430>

To summarise, decent diplomacy is not the be all and end all of protecting our citizens. But it is an important part. As is taking urgent actions when our citizens need them. As is the perception of these efforts occurring. These matters specifically refer to ToR e. opportunities to build on shared historical and cultural values... I hope we take our chances to build on shared values.