

Alain Juppe / 'No change in French foreign policy'

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TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK DOHA Former French prime minister and now the Mayor of Bordeaux, Alain Juppe sees no change in French policy towards the Middle East. Juppe, who was here to participate in the 9th Doha Forum, told mediapersons on Monday that his country's stand on the issues concerning the region has not changed. "There's continuity in the French policy towards the Middle East and I don't see a change concerning the policy implemented by former president Jacques Chirac. What is our policy? We think that France must have a balanced position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are the friends of Israel and we are the friends of the Arab nations. The role of France is to contribute in building bridges between the two sets of nations. We think that there is no military solution to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. We must support the efforts of the international community to build two states, living in peace with each other, which is supported by the US, European Union, Russia and by the United Nations as well. That is our line. And I don't think that someone could say that France chose one camp against the other," said Juppe. On Iraq, Juppe sounded optimistic about the way the new US government was handling the military operation there. He said, "As you know, France has not supported the American intervention in Iraq, because we are very attached to multilateralism. We think that such intervention must be decided by the UN Security Council and not by a country, however powerful it is. Now I think that President Obama has a clear policy. He wants to withdraw the American troops, which is a good idea. I think this policy will succeed in Iraq and we support it." Juppe praised the efforts of the Qatari government for its successful mediation in the Sudan-Chad agreement for bilateral cooperation. He said, "This agreement between Sudan and Chad is good news. I congratulate Qatar for facilitating the agreement between the two parties. I wish that the UN Security Council resolution will be implemented by all the protagonists in the conflict and by the Sudanese government itself." Earlier, Juppe had met with several high-ranking Qatari officials, including the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Urban Planning HE Sheikh Abdurrahman bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz al Thani. He reiterated France's keenness to develop cooperation with Doha in the fields of business, aeronautics, construction, defence, culture, science and education. "The basis of agreement between the Education City and a France-based business school has been finalised. Also, we are looking at cooperation between justice ministers, where we can provide training to judges in respective systems. Seeing the French community in Doha growing is a good sign of dynamism in the relationship between Qatar and France. The French community here has grown by 26% in one year. This is both an opportunity and good indication for French foreign policy relation between Qatar and France," he added. Juppe, who is currently Mayor of Bordeaux, was the Prime Minister of France from 1995 to 1997. He is a strong advocate of multilateralism to build a peaceful world and is pleased with his city's achievements and advances in infrastructure and housing. (LRRD)