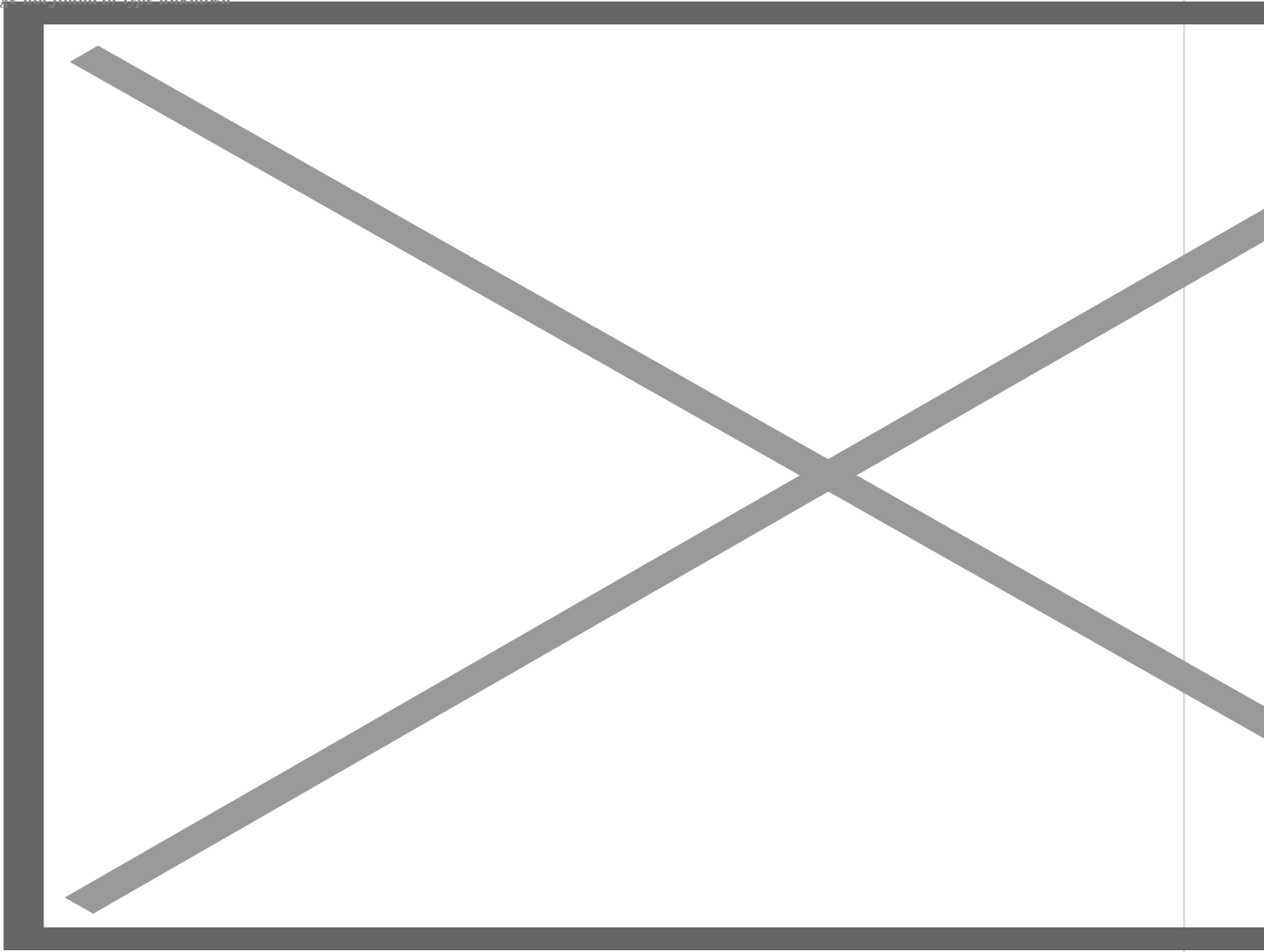


Palestinians unify as Arab states 'normalize' Israel relations

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Demonstrations in Ramallah in favor of Palestinian unity. (Photo: Al Jazeera)

Gaza City, September 15 (RHC)-- Prompted by Arab states normalizing relations with Israel, fractured Palestinian political factions are working diligently in multilateral talks to restore unity and mend the division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in negotiations far more promising than previous efforts.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain's foreign ministers signed on Tuesday an agreement with Israel at the White House establishing full ties in violation of the Arab Peace Initiative. The move is a threat to long-standing Arab demands that Israel ends its decades-long occupation and agree on a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

On Saturday, Palestinian groups led by Hamas and Fatah agreed on a "unified field leadership" comprising all factions that will lead "comprehensive popular resistance" against the Israeli occupation, a statement said.

The formation of the joint leadership group and progress in the intra-Palestinian unity talks came after a long-awaited September 3rd meeting among Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Hamas's Ismail Haniya, Islamic Jihad's chief Ziyad al-Nakhala, and the leaders of various Palestinian entities. Gatherings were held in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank and Beirut, Lebanon.

Hamas and other Palestinian parties have for years demanded that such a meeting take place, but Abbas always rejected the move, calling on Hamas to honour previous unity pacts first.

But with the Palestinian cause lately facing so many challenges - the most important being the normalization between Arab countries and Israel - Abbas agreed to hold discussions.

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