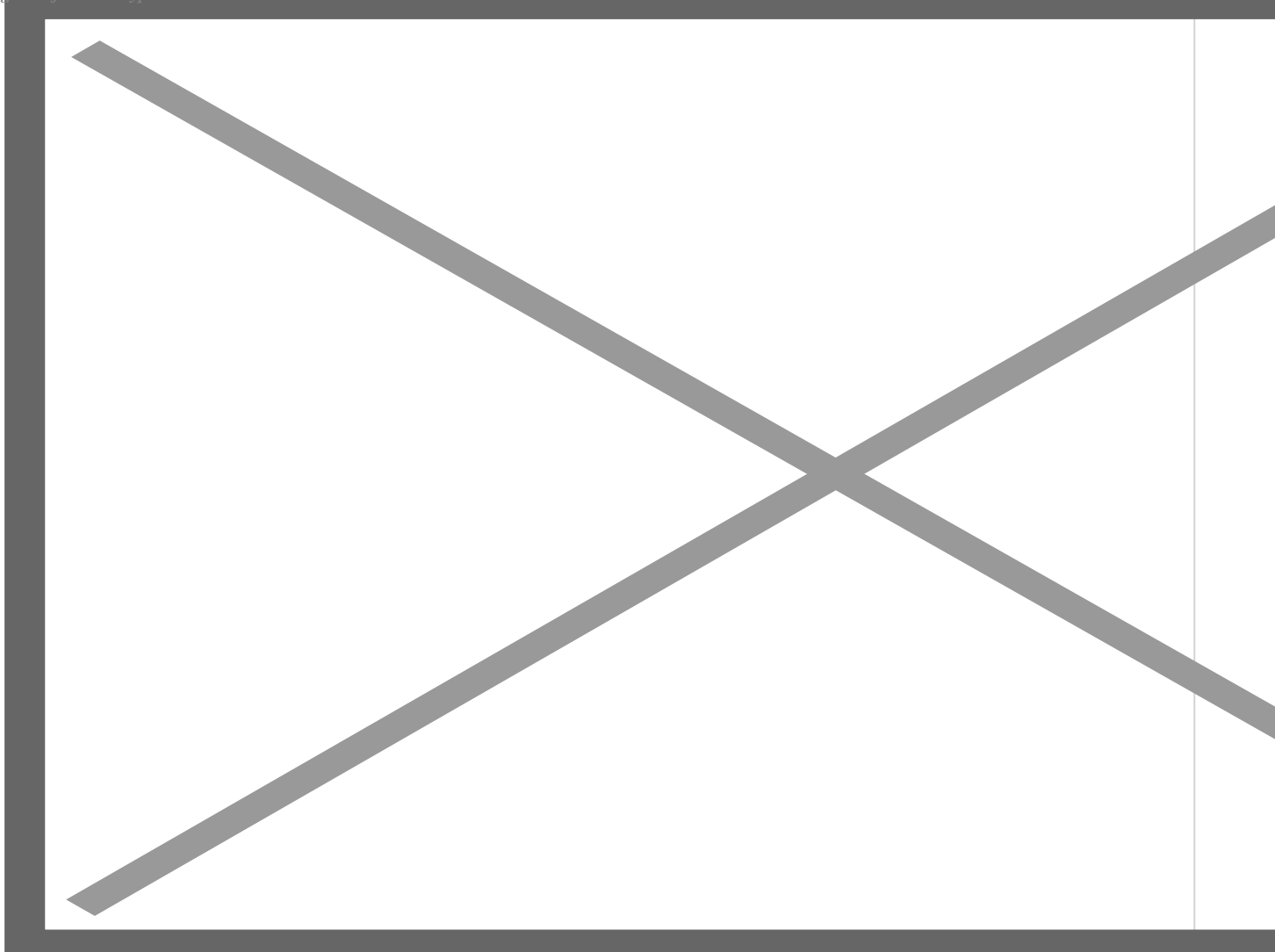


Hamas slams UAE for support of Israel's settlement expansion in West Bank

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Israeli settlements on hills surrounding Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. (Photo: AFP)

Gaza City, November 16 (RHC)-- The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has lambasted the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over its “real support” for Israel’s settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank.

In a statement on Sunday, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qasem said Abu Dhabi had just recently received the head of “the Zionist Settlements Council” in the West Bank and concluded economic agreements with him, the Yemeni Arabic-language al-Masirah television network reported.

He said the recent visit to the UAE by outspoken annexation advocate Yossi Dagan, who heads a council for Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, and the signing of economic agreements between the two sides shows Abu Dhabi’s “practical support” for Israel’s settlement expansion in the Palestinian territories.

The Hamas official said the UAE leaders’ cooperation with Israeli settlement expansion companies clearly violates all resolutions adopted by the Arab League against Israel’s settlements.

“It is shameful that many countries and international bodies continue to boycott settlements and all their products, while the UAE is striving to strengthen its relationship with the Zionist settlement system,” Qassem added.

All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law as they are built on the occupied Palestinian land.

Under a U.S.-brokered agreement reached between Israel and the UAE some two months ago on the normalization of ties, the Tel Aviv regime had supposedly agreed to “temporarily” suspend applying its rule to further areas in the occupied West Bank and the strategic Jordan Valley that Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had pledged to annex.

While Emirati officials have described the normalization deal with the Tel Aviv regime as a successful means to stave off annexation and save the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israeli leaders have lined up to call the bluff of Abu Dhabi’s crown prince and de facto ruler of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who claimed Israel’s annexation plans were off the table.

Bahrain and Sudan have also reached a U.S.-brokered normalization agreement with the occupying regime. The normalization deals have drawn widespread condemnation from Palestinians, who seek an independent state in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital. They say the deals ignore their rights and do not serve the Palestinian cause.

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