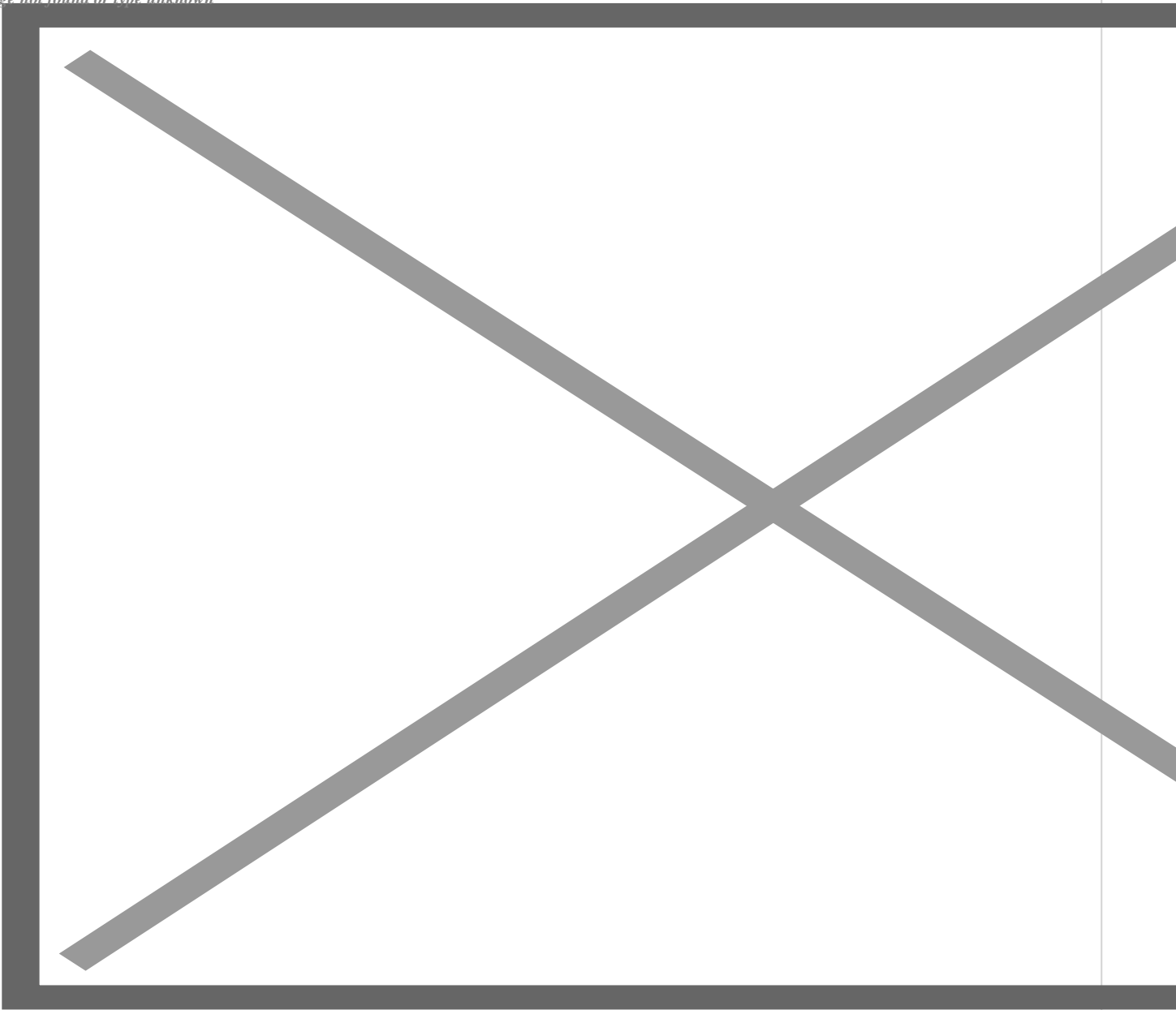


Russia rejects U.S. decision on Western Sahara

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Moscow, December 12 (RHC)-- Russia has rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Moroccan "sovereignty" over Western Sahara — as part of a normalization deal between Morocco and the Israeli regime — as a violation of international law.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov on Friday called the US decision "unilateral" and said "there are relevant resolutions, there is the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara." "This is a violation of international law," Bogdanov said.

Trump tweeted on Thursday that "Israel and the Kingdom of Morocco have agreed to full diplomatic relations." The White House said in a statement that Trump sealed the agreement in a telephone conversation with Morocco's King Mohammed VI.

As part of the agreement, Trump, who is due to leave office on January 20, agreed to recognize Morocco's "sovereignty" over the contested Western Sahara region. Morocco annexed the vast Western Sahara region, a former Spanish colony, in the 1970s and has since been in conflict with the Algeria-backed Polisario Front, a movement that seeks to establish an independent state in the territory and end Morocco's presence there.

Morocco is currently in control of 80 percent of the region, including its phosphate deposits and fishing waters. On Thursday, the United Nations (UN) said its position on the disputed Western Sahara region was "unchanged" despite the U.S. recognition of Moroccan "sovereignty."

The United Nations has deployed a peacekeeping mission, the MINURSO, to the region to monitor a ceasefire and to supposedly organize a referendum on the region's status. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres believes "the solution to the question can still be found based on Security Council resolutions," his spokesman said.

Morocco became the fourth Arab country, after the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Sudan, to normalize ties with the Israeli regime since August. The normalization deals have been condemned by all Palestinian factions as a betrayal of their cause.

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