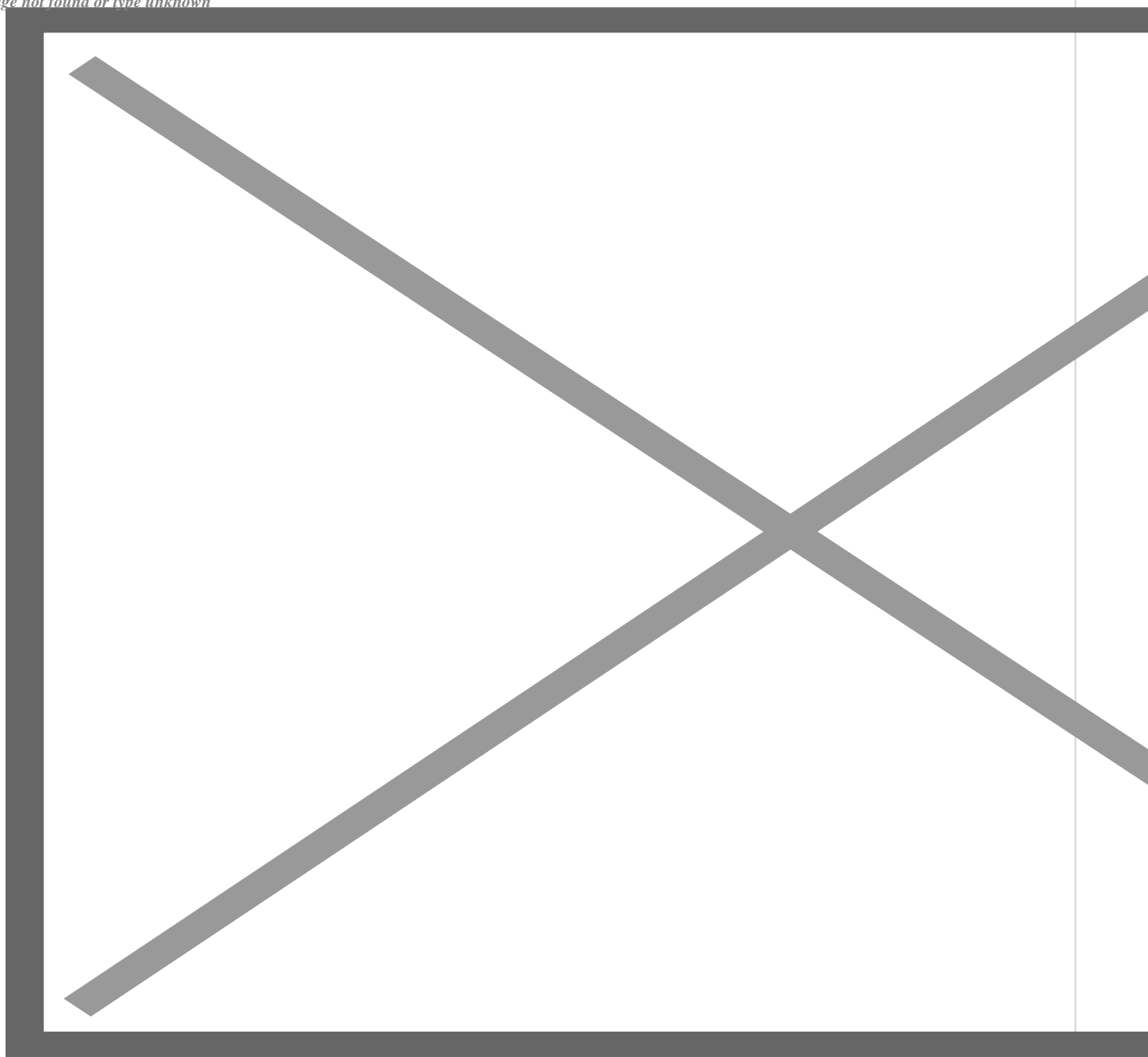


Palestinians flee Khan Younis as Israel steps up ground operation

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Palestinian families flee the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis on the coastal road leading to Rafah. [AFP]

Khan Younis, January 22 (RHC)-- Israeli forces have stormed one hospital and placed another under siege in the southern Gaza Strip, cutting wounded people off from trauma care, Palestinian officials say.

Israeli soldiers on Monday advanced for the first time into al-Mawasi district near the Mediterranean coast west of Khan Younis, the main city in southern Gaza. There, they stormed Al-Khair General Hospital and arrested medical staff, Gaza Ministry of Health spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra told the news agency Reuters.

There was no immediate word from Israel on the situation at the hospital. The military spokesperson's office had no comment. The Palestine Red Crescent Society said tanks had surrounded another Khan Younis hospital, El Amal City Hospital, headquarters of the rescue agency, which had lost contact with its staff there.

Qudra said at least 50 people were killed overnight in Khan Younis and the sieges of medical facilities mean dozens of dead and wounded were beyond the reach of rescuers. "The Israeli occupation is preventing ambulance vehicles from moving to recover bodies of martyrs and the wounded from western Khan Younis," he said.

Israel has accused Hamas fighters of operating in and around hospitals -- without providing proof. Hamas and medical staff have strongly denied the allegations.\

Residents said bombardments from air, land and sea were the most intense in the southern sector of Gaza since the war of aggression began on October 7th as Israeli tanks surged across Khan Younis towards the Mediterranean coast.

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