



Public Policy: Ensuring the safety and security of returning residents to safe areas by remove the unexploded ordnance (UXO) and explosive remnants of war (ERW)

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Executive Summary:

This policy paper examines the critical issue of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Sudan. It discusses the significant impact these devices have on civilian populations, hindering reconstruction efforts and posing a serious threat to returning residents. The paper proposes a comprehensive strategy to address this challenge, including public awareness campaigns, international cooperation, and the implementation of advanced technologies. By prioritizing the safety of returning residents and providing necessary support to victims, Sudan can work towards a safer and more prosperous future.



Introduction:

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has resulted in widespread displacement and significant threats from unexploded ordnance (UXO) and explosive remnants of war (ERW). Ensuring the safety and security of returning residents in newly safe areas is paramount. Through identify & remove the ERW without risking human lives.

When an armed conflict is over, the battlefields are often littered with explosive debris. Much of this debris is still dangerous, in particular stocks of weapons left behind by combatants and explosive munitions that were fired but failed to go off as intended. (1)

For the civilians and communities in war-affected countries the presence of these weapons represents an ongoing threat. Many innocent civilians have lost their lives and limbs by disturbing or inadvertently coming into contact with explosive remnants of war. These weapons can also hinder reconstruction and threaten economic livelihood. Houses, hospitals and schools cannot be rebuilt until such weapons are cleared. Contaminated land cannot be farmed.

Local communities often have no means of dealing with the problem themselves. Most do not have the technical capacity or the resources to clear explosive remnants of war safely and few the resources needed to deal with the psychological, medical and rehabilitative needs of victims.

The return of citizens without the complete and professional removal of the remnants of war could pose a direct threat to their lives.

As well as, the enhance the safety of returning residents by identifying and mapping explosive hazards in safe areas of Sudan & support the Rule of Law sector in ensuring safe resettlement and adherence to international humanitarian standards, is an important objective that must be collectively pursued.

International Experiences

Each year large numbers of civilians are killed and injured by "explosive remnants of war". These are the unexploded weapons such as artillery shells, mortars, grenades, bombs and rockets, left behind after an armed conflict. In 2003, the international community adopted a treaty to help reduce the human suffering caused by explosive remnants of war and bring rapid assistance to affected communities.

Globally, there are millions of explosive remnants of war on the ground today affecting more than 80 countries. Some countries have been dealing with this problem for decades. Poland, for example, has cleared some 100 million items from the two World Wars. In Laos, where the wars in Indochina ended in 1975, tens of millions of explosive remnants of war still remain to be cleared. More recent conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan have also produced significant amounts of explosive remnants of war.

States have taken a significant step towards reducing the human suffering caused by explosive remnants of war and bringing assistance to affected communities. The Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War, adopted in November 2003 by the States Parties to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons is a major advance in efforts to end the suffering caused by unexploded and abandoned munitions.

The use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, especially cities and other urban centers, multiplies the human cost, because the number of direct and indirect victims in such environments is higher and the difficulty of clearing UXO is much greater. Recent and ongoing conflicts, be it in the Middle East, the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, are clear examples.



Sudan's Experience

Several armed conflicts that have happened in Sudan since 1955 have left behind a legacy of explosive hazards, including landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) affecting marginalized communities in the conflict affected areas.

As per Chief Mine Action Program Mr. Mohammad Sediq Rashid, 2,572 men, women, girls, and boys have fallen victims to landmines and other explosive remnants of war in Sudan (2), this statistic is before the current war of 15 April 2023.

In March 2019, 8 children were killed in a tragic accident in the Al-Fatah area of Omdurman province due to the explosion of an old bomb from military training leftovers, after they tried to play with it and dismantle it.

Even during the protests that lasted for 4 months and led to the overthrow of the Bashir regime, there was a normalization with the catching the tear gas canisters by the protesters, as they attempted to grab and throw them back towards the policemen as an act of bravery and enthusiasm. Without thinking about the danger repercussions of this behavior, however, the explosion of some of these canisters resulted in tragic incidents, leading to the amputation of the hands of some of the enthusiastic protesters.

Problem Description

Including the current conflict (15 April War), Sudan has been plagued by prolonged conflicts, leading to the displacement of millions and the contamination of large areas with landmines and other ERW. As stability returns to some regions, there is an urgent need to clear these areas to facilitate safe resettlement. If we take Omdurman as example, an entire more than year of war has reduced it to ruins and rubble. Still, some residents who fled elsewhere have set off for home return despite the danger and uncertainty ahead. Recently, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in Omdurman took back control of most of the areas from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), there is coordinated effort between the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Khartoum State Government, and the police, as they begin work on removing debris and rehabilitating and reconstructing the Omdurman market. This follows the completion of essential repairs to electricity, water, and other basic services. These efforts aim to enhance the return of citizens. (3)

Though there are no official statistics for the number of returnees or those wishing to return to the city, unofficial estimates indicate that more than two thousand families have returned to Omdurman within about two months.

The Chamber of Travel Buses, a union body organizing the work of buses traveling through Sudan states, announced in a statement on Sunday that on April 25, it began land trips for the voluntary return of Omdurman residents who fled the war to Port Sudan city in eastern Sudan.

Meanwhile, the official authorities said they were still facing major challenges to ensure the safe return of the citizens to Omdurman, including remnants of war and unexploded ordinance, damaged water and electricity networks, and the spread of decomposing bodies on most of the city's streets.

The Khartoum State government said in a statement on Sunday that it had completed the training of 90 specialists to remove war remnants and foreign objects in the old Omdurman area, which is still it's not enough effort, comparing with town space & a huge number of ERW.

In addition of families' returned, there is initiative launched to restore Omdurman market, traders from Omdurman market in Khartoum City have initiated a project to rehabilitate and revive the market following the end of military operations in the area, which very risky if there is ERW among of the shops & the narrow alleys in that market. (4)



In other part of Sudan, two children had died and another was seriously injured due to the explosion of a war remnant shell in the Texas neighborhood in Nyala. (5)

As conclusion, the return of citizens without the complete and professional removal of the remnants of war could pose a direct threat to their lives.

Policy Options

Ensuring the safety and security of returning residents to safe areas by the remove the unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war, involves taking a series of integrated & coordinated actions by various actors, with no separate or isolated policies, and must be carefully considered by all relevant parties, including the citizens themselves, They have to bear in minds many considerations before they return back to their areas that were battlefields.

Recommendations

There are several integrated measures that must be taken by various actors, and these measures include the following:

It is advisable for the citizens to don't return back to any area until noted the official announcement by authorities of the controlling party on the ground the completion of the operations of remove the unexploded ordnance (UXO) and explosive remnants of war (ERW), also If anyone have seen something suspicious, he/she has to stop, don't go near it; don't touch it; don't throw anything at it; and don't pick it up, If the citizen notice a suspicious UXO, must alert others and warn them about it, and immediately report it to the police and local authorities for proper handling.

Contrast, the primary responsibility for protecting civilians from unexploded ordnance and remnants of war falls on the party controlling on the ground, before urging the citizens to return, they must organize it, as their role requires firstly, arranging the return of civilians to their areas until clearing operations are completed and issuing announcement by their authorities.

Coordinating with the military technical sectors to conduct surveys to locate unexploded ordnance and dispose of them according to technical and international protocols, providing a hotline for citizens to report any suspicious UXO, additional to advocacy role by conduct awareness campaigns and guidance through media, social media, markets, mosques, and gathering places regarding the necessary steps to be taken by citizens in case of seen of UXO.

In term of the governance exercising, there is role of Request & urge the countries in a position & international organizations to provide assistance for the remove the unexploded ordnance, care and rehabilitation of victims, Allocate resources in the general budget to remove unexploded ordnance, and raise the issue on the public policy agenda, and facilitating coordination among various stakeholders such as: integration and involvement of local NGO's, volunteers additional to emergency response rooms in awareness, monitoring, and reporting of unexploded ordnance.

That role also extend to studying previous and current international experiences in this field, drawing lessons learned, and integrating appropriate advance technologies for Sudanese context and environment, leading the awareness campaigns to educate communities about the dangers of explosives and how to respond if they encounter them, coordination to improve the coherence, effectiveness and impact of collective responses delivered in support of localities authorities and to facilitate effective engagement by international actors.



As for the military forces and their technical units, they are responsible for most important & direct roles, which start from record information on the explosives they used during a conflict and share that information with other parties and clearance organizations once the fighting has ended, where lacking of information has often slowed efforts to deal with explosive remnants of war, identify, mark, monitor, and clear areas containing ERW and provide civilians with effective warnings of the location and dangers of ERW, record comprehensive and accurate information on the explosive munitions employed or abandoned by its armed forces; to share this information with the party in control of the territory where the ERW are located and/or with any organization that will be undertaking clearance or risk education activities, Provide, where feasible, assistance (technical, financial, material or other) to the party in control of the affected territory, to facilitate the marking and clearance, removal or destruction of ERW, Fencing and monitoring affected areas; and to survey and assess the risks posed by ERW, and mark and clear, remove or destroy ERW, also trying to leverage drone technology to provide a cost-effective and efficient solution for explosive hazard identification, this technology is used already in Ukraine.

Conclusion

Removing the ERW and unexploded ordnance in Sudan represents a significant decisive factor in ensuring the safety of returnees and rebuilding war-torn communities. Under the guidance and supervision of localities (municipalities) & specialist technical military sectors, this will provide a safer, more efficient, and legally compliant approach to managing explosive hazards. By leveraging advanced technology, we can enhance the safety, security, and well-being of Sudanese citizens as they return to their homes.

References:

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