

by Major General Gordon Messenger. MoD spokesman

The disruption caused by the cloud of volcanic ash over Europe has had no impact on our ability to prosecute operations in Afghanistan. We are working hard to ensure that any disruption to the support of operations in Afghanistan is kept to an absolute minimum as a result of the limitations placed on flying into, and out of, UK airspace. As is the case for many British citizens across the world, the biggest impact of the ash cloud will be on individuals and their families.

The flying restrictions mean that the relief in place of troops at the end of their tour is currently suspended but we have done and continue to do everything we can to ensure everyone delayed in Cyprus is returned to the UK as quickly as possible. We have flown all remaining delayed troops to Spain and will move them home from Santander to the UK aboard HMS Albion. We are actively developing alternative routes so that the relief in place and R&R can resume.

Care of casualties remains an absolute priority and we have an agreement in place with the US to evacuate casualties through their medical chain if necessary. We have sufficient stocks and medical facilities in Afghanistan to provide appropriate medical care for anyone who cannot be evacuated. At no stage will the medical care of our injured be compromised.

UK forces always maintain equipment stocks at a level that ensures we can cope with disruption to the supply chain but we will monitor stocks closely to ensure troops are not put at risk. For urgent supplies we have initiated an alternate line of communication overland through southern Europe to connect with an adjusted air bridge to Afghanistan.