

# UN eases blockade on Serbia

SERBIA will today reap the first rewards for apparently cutting off its clients in Bosnia, with the United Nations' decision to reopen Belgrade airport and renew cultural and sporting ties for a 100-day trial period.

The move to lift a few of the sanctions imposed on the rump Yugoslavia for its role in the Bosnian war comes in spite of suspicion in Washington and among UN officials that the Serbian blockade of Bosnia is leaking.

It was based on a report compiled by 93 international monitors, who have concluded, after several weeks spent along Serbia's 350-mile border with Bosnia, that nothing but humanitarian aid is crossing to Bosnian Serbian forces.

William Perry, the US Defense Secretary, on Monday questioned Belgrade's commitment to isolate

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EMMA DALY  
in Zagreb

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the Bosnian Serbs. And the UN has reported numerous Bosnian Serb helicopter flights over Bosnia in the past month, prompting speculation that supplies that can no longer cross unseen by land are being flown in.

UN officers reported seeing dozens of Bosnian Serb helicopter sorties across northern Bosnia on Saturday night, violating the no-fly rule. The movements mirrored those seen in the second week of September, when hundreds of night flights were recorded around Tuzla, Srebrenica and Sapna in north-eastern Bosnia.

The UN received reports of 55 helicopter flights between 6.45pm and 11.30pm on Saturday around Srebrenica, close to the border

with Serbia, and along the Posavina corridor between Breko and Prijedor. Although UN troops on the ground relayed the information to Nato, the alliance was unable to confirm any of the sightings.

Captain Jim Mitchell said neither the Awac surveillance planes, which have blind spots over much of Bosnia, nor jet fighters, had seen the helicopters. But he added: "We have no reason to doubt there is something going on."

There is no hard evidence that the self-proclaimed Bosnian Serb state received outside help from the Yugoslav army for the helicopter flights. But it seems unlikely that the statelet, which is estimated to possess about 30 helicopters, and which is theoretically cut off from fuel supplies, could manage such a large-scale

operation alone. "It's conceivable that they did it on their own," Colonel Andrew Duncan, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said. "But it's equally conceivable that they had logistic support". This might include aviation fuel or perhaps the loan of Yugoslav helicopters and pilots.

Military officials working in Bosnia believe that it would require 4,000 to 5,000 troops to seal a border marked by rivers and mountains, which has more than 40 main crossing points and many minor roads. The international community, desperate for a settlement, believes President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia is the only man who can force the Bosnian Serbs to agree to the peace plan. The price of his limited co-operation has been an easing of sanctions, albeit for 100 days.

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