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Haaretz Editorial

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The Gaza-bound aid flotilla has achieved its goal, albeit at the bloody price of nine dead and dozens wounded. A week after the Israel Navy intercepted the ships, the hermetic blockade of Gaza has been ripped wide open, while Israel has been the target of massive international criticism and demands for an investigation.

The blockade dissolved with Egypt's announcement on Tuesday that the Rafah border crossing will remain permanently open. Though Palestinians still cannot traverse it freely, the sweeping exit ban that Israel and Egypt had imposed for the last few years on Gaza's 1.5 million residents has ended.

As in a commercial market, the moment Israel lost its monopoly over the gateways to Gaza, the consumers benefited from competition. Amira Hass reports in today's Haaretz that the list of goods that Israel allows into the Strip has been expanded, and from now on, Gaza residents will be able to spice their food with coriander (though only the seeds, not the leaves), which had previously been off-limits to them. All it took was an alternative entryway, through Egypt, for the Israeli gateway to Gaza to be opened wider as well.

The Israeli blockade of Gaza and all it entailed - the goods forbidden entry, the lies about how there was no humanitarian crisis there - was a form of collective punishment against an impoverished and oppressed population that cast a moral stain on Israeli democracy. Nor did this blockade achieve its promised goals. The Hamas government did not fall, Gaza residents did not rise up against it, and Gilad Shalit is still in captivity.

But even if the blockade should have been lifted, the manner in which this happened reflects a lack of understanding and faulty judgment on the part of the government led by Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak. Instead of working to ease the blockade, limiting it to justified efforts to prevent arms smuggling, Israel tried to maintain a complete closure - and then lost control because of the botched raid. In attempting to show the whole world how "strong" he is, Netanyahu ended up handing victory to Hamas and its Turkish supporters.

It is not too late to minimize the damage. The government must remove the last remnants of the blockade and replace it with an inspection and enforcement regime governing maritime traffic to Gaza, with international participation, to prevent rockets and other arms from entering in the guise of humanitarian aid shipments. The situation that existed before the flotilla failure does not exist any longer, and any attempt to resuscitate it will only cause Israel additional damage.