The historical connection of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel runs very deep; no other group has a comparable connection. Throughout history, there has never been an independent national political entity in the Land of Israel that was not Jewish. Over hundreds of years of Muslim rule, the residents of the Land of Israel were never recognized as a separate national entity and the attitude towards the land was mostly one of neglect. Even the Muslim religious connection to Jerusalem was derivative of the ancient Jewish connection to the Temple mount.

For two thousand years, the Jews were systematically prevented from returning to their land. Every time a movement arose among the Jews to do so, it was forcefully suppressed by the nations of the world, whether by papal bulls banning ships carrying Jewish immigrants from sailing from Italian ports in the 15th century or by the centuries-long Ottoman ban on Jewish immigration and acquisition of land in the Land of Israel. The Law of Return is a minor and belated correction to centuries-old injustices that favored specifically non-Jewish populations in the Land of Israel.

This deep connection was recognized by Great Britain in the Balfour Declaration, and in the mandate the League of Nations granted the British that related to both the Land of Israel and Transjordan. Great Britain was reprimanded by the League of Nations when it set aside 74 percent of the area subject to the mandate for the establishment of the dictatorial fiction that is called the Kingdom of Jordan, importing the royal Hashemite family from Arabia for political reasons. It is unnecessary to point out that this action by the British was condemned by all parties at the Zionist Congress that took place immediately afterward.

After the founding of the state of Israel, the Kingdom of Jordan did not do make any move towards founding a separate Palestinian state in the nineteen years between 1948 and 1967, and no Arab state made any serious efforts to advance Palestinian nationalism. Even among the Arabs living in the Land of Israel, ‘Palestinian’ was a secondary identity, and only a minority identified at all as Palestinians. Most of the Arabs of the Land of Israel saw themselves as Arabs, southern Syrians, or pan-Arab nationalists. The discourse of Palestinian nationalism barely existed during those years, not even in the U.N. decision of 1947 to divide the Land of Israel, which referred to an “Arab state” rather than a “Palestinian state.” This state of affairs changed radically after the Six-Day War when Palestinian nationalism came to the forefront as a political device to attack the state of Israel in the international community after the collapse of Nasser’s dream of pan-Arabism. The ongoing “Jewish-Arab conflict” was re-branded as the “Jewish-Palestinian conflict.” The combination of Arab/Muslim economic power and classical anti-Semitism has have amplified the “Palestinian problem” on the international stage to absurd proportions.

Not a single Arab state is a democracy or has a reasonable human rights record. Nationalist consciousness in most Arab countries is weak and very vague, as can be seen in the states that collapsed so quickly after the Arab spring, like Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq. In this context, the attacks by Arab countries on Israel about the rights of the Palestinian nation or Palestinian human rights are absurd and hypocritical.

The Arab/Muslim refusal to accept the state of Israel as a non-Muslim entity in the Middle East prevented any real basis for dialogue and for decades the only policy available to Israel to defend itself from Arab aggression was Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall.” Under different historical circumstances, we would possibly now be near the conclusion of a painful but reasonable compromise, after the division of the land either in 1947 or after 1967, 1995, or 2000.

In any case, once such a compromise became unattainable, the settlement project, arising after the Jewish return to the historical Jewish heartland, became both necessary and obvious. Both the realization of the historical connection to the land, and the sites of biblical narrative like Hebron, Bethlehem, Beit El, Shiloh and Shekhem and the Israeli “Iron Wall” defense strategy required this policy. It is both unreasonable and immoral to expect the Jewish people not to realize its connection to its native heartland in order to preserve the mere possibility of a compromise that reality time and again had shown to be impossible.

Nevertheless, beyond the question of their nationalist aspirations, there is a real problem with the civic status of the Arabs living in Judea, Samarian (and the Gaza Strip). This problem became less acute after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which gave the Palestinians the power to improve their living conditions and to strengthen their civil rights by electing their own parliament which had authority over most areas of civil administration. However, the Palestinians, with the support of the Arab states and the West, again embraced radical rhetoric and, later, acts of violent terrorism, resulting in the deterioration of the situation due to the Israeli response. Despite this deterioration, in light of what has been described above, there is no basis for the demand that the solution depend upon the banishing or ethnic cleansing of the Jewish population in the region. Such a demand is based on the assumption that the Jewish population is the only group whose mobility allows for its banishment or expulsion without consideration of its rights.

B’Tselem’s report is not noteworthy for its trustworthiness about any of the many topics it addresses. However, its main fault lies in ignoring the historical connection of the Jewish people to its heartland, and the Arab-Palestinian intransigence which undermined attempts at compromise over and over for the last hundred years. The source of this intransigence is understandable, as Palestinian nationalism was founded on the rejection of Zionism and of any compromise with the Zionists. This does not mean that Israel is responsible for the ongoing "interim" situation.

Rather, it is incumbent on all enlightened nations to take advantage of this interim situation to strengthen Israel’s regional standing in the region as a means of applying pressure on the different Arab nations to arrive at an optimal resolution of the conflict. A part of such a resolution could involve the annexation of large or small portions of land to Israeli sovereignty, gradually granting citizenship to the Arab residents who desire it, and the gradual strengthening of Palestinian autonomy in a manner that will not threaten Israeli interests but will improve Palestinian living conditions significantly.

At the same time, a permanent arrangement cannot ignore the undemocratic Kingdom of Jordan, most of whose residents are ‘Palestinians,’ i.e., people (or their descendants) who fled to Jordan in 1948 or 1967 from the western side of the Jordan River. When Jordan becomes a democracy (and thus a Palestinian state), it will become possible to refine the arrangement by thinking creatively about mixed Jordanian-Israeli citizenship for the residents of the region. What works for Hong Kong (“one country – two systems”) could also work for Israel under its special conditions as the lone democracy fighting for its existence in a jungle of hostile Muslim dictatorships who are deeply opposed to Israel’s continued existence in the region.