

Partners for Progressive Israel's Celebrating Harold, an evening of music, poetry and 90 years of memories will take place Monday, March 5th at City Winery in NYC. I encourage you to join us as we pay tribute to Harold Shapiro, a mainstay of the Israel-left, a man who continually worked for peace and justice. In honor of Harold's enthusiastic support of the arts, entertainers who knew him, will perform; it promises to be a night you won't forget.

## President's Comment

### *War Drums? Probably Not*

Saturday, February 10, has been proclaimed as a turning point in Israel's 'relations' with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which Israel's political leadership ([though not its military](#)) consider its most dangerous and intractable enemy. Though Iran and Israel have been at loggerheads since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979 (despite Israel providing arms for it to fight Iraq in the 1980s), they have never come into direct conflict before. However, Israel reported it had shot down an advanced Iranian drone overflying Israeli territory, and retaliated by striking 12 Iranian and Syrian bases in Syria. In the process, 36 anti-aircraft missiles were fired from Syria, one of which hit and destroyed an Israeli jet, though the crewmen ejected over Israel and were rescued. This is the first loss of an Israeli plane to Syria since 1982, despite a reported hundred Israeli sorties over Syria in recent years, primarily to interdict arms shipments to Hizbollah. Since then, as of Feb. 23 at least, quiet has prevailed in that theater.

Most commentators (e.g., [Amos Harel](#), a [Brookings paper](#), and many more) have seen this as a dangerous new stage in Israel's relationship with the ongoing conflict in Syria, in which Iranian determination to increase its hegemony, now that ISIS has apparently been defeated there, collides with Israeli determination to limit Iranian influence and concomitant military power. This happens, in no way coincidentally, as Russia, Turkey, the US, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Kurds and of course the Assad government, as well as various other sub-national forces, jockey for influence and territory in the new post-ISIS environment. There are various credible scenarios for conflicts between major powers there, but perhaps the most serious is Iran vs. Israel (presumably backed up by the US), which both sides see as existential.

Thus, Iran and Israel, according to that scenario, are testing each other's red lines and, since Iran's hegemonic goals in the Levant are incompatible with Israel's security demands, to say nothing of Israel's opposition to the 2016 JCPOA nuclear deal, continuing military confrontation is likely. This is aggravated by Israel's obvious tacit alliance with Saudi Arabia, two of the strangest bedfellows

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## UPCOMING CONVERSATION

March 8, 2018 at 2.00pm EST

A WEBINAR ON

***Power and Possibility:*** Women's leadership in Israel and the US today

**Naomi Chazan**, former Israeli Knesset Deputy Speaker

**Jane Eisner**, Editor-in-Chief of the Forward

*Moderated by Hillit Zwick, The Alliance for Israel's Future*

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in history, drawn together primarily by a common fear and hatred of Iran. Both are urging President Trump to take action to abrogate the JCPOA, against the united opposition of virtually all other world powers. Most commentators seem to believe an Israeli-Iranian military confrontation is all but inevitable, probably sooner rather than later.

I disagree. To my mind, these events have reaffirmed and strengthened the status quo between Israel and Iran and Syria and, for good measure, between Hezbollah and Israel. Another war has been predicted on that front almost since the end of the second Lebanon-Israel War in 2006. While the area will remain volatile for the imaginable future, I think the recent events lanced the boil, so to speak, and prevented the infection from strengthening. There is every indication that neither Israel nor Iran has any desire for a war that would be ruinous for both – and ultimately, almost certainly inconclusive. Hezbollah, with a reported 130,000 missiles (that is not a misprint) aimed at Israel could do serious damage, but only at the cost of southern (or all) Lebanon being literally pulverized. Mistakes and miscalculations, like those that led to the 2006 war, can never be ruled out, but the balance of terror that now exists prevents any realist from believing any war could be quick and easy.

Moreover, the dynamics of last week's confrontation were almost fortuitous. Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah were able to crow over bringing down an Israeli jet, thus puncturing Israel's invincible aura. Likewise, Israel reacted to a genuine provocation in shooting down a drone over its territory and retaliated, as it traditionally does, with overwhelming force,

destroying a number of military facilities in the process. Thus, both sides can legitimately claim they taught the other side a lesson it will not quickly forget. More importantly, both sides showed each other what their red lines are, and reaffirmed a status quo that is likely to prevail. Russia, a major ally of Iran in Syria, probably doesn't have veto power over it, but would push strongly against Iran aggravating Israel to the point of war.

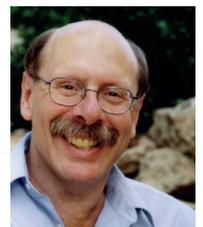
The only really puzzling aspect of this is: why the drone? Iran must have known that Israel would spot it and react. Was it a statement of bravado? Did they think Israel wouldn't see it? A deliberate provocation to see how Israel would react? Or simply a technical glitch? Some claim it was Israeli disinformation. No explanation seems to fit, so I would guess at the most innocuous; a technical or political glitch that ended up reinforcing the status quo.

Of course, this comes as the Israeli police recommended to the State Prosecutor that Prime Minister Netanyahu be indicted, a key Netanyahu confidant is now cooperating fully with the police, and further revelations are emerging daily. I, personally, no fan of Bibi, still do not think that he would stoop to aggravating a military situation that could lead to a major war in order to make himself appear indispensable. In fact, he is fortunate in that no popular successor is visible in the ranks of the Likud, so his vow to stay in office whatever comes is likely to be maintainable without creating a security crisis. "Busy[ing] giddy minds with foreign quarrels" appears unnecessary.

What are the implications of these disparate crises for us in the US? Minimal, is my guess. Liberal American Jews have no heft in the US administration, the Israeli government, or even much within Israeli society at this point. The only thing we can do in real time is to support our Israeli compatriots in their efforts to bring desperately needed change to Israeli politics – as well as our own efforts to do the same here. ■

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*Paul Scham is President of Partners  
for Progressive Israel and a Research  
Associate Professor of Israel Studies at  
University of Maryland.*



# Reflections on PPI's Symposiums

By Steve Haze



I am neither a scholar nor a diplomat and hence cannot speak with the authority others might be able to bring to the Middle East issues that vex us all. But I have had the privilege of participating in four Israel Symposia with PPI since 2008. Furthermore, I am a Gentile from California, married for many years into a family that was fortunate to flee Nazi Germany prior to the outbreak of World War II and the Holocaust.

So for over 50 years I have had a strong interest in Israel— since it was a young nation, and I too have embraced the idealistic aspirations of a people returning to its homeland from the diaspora. Before that, as a teenager after the Six Day War, I even thought about the possibility of immigrating to Israel and joining a kibbutz. My own sense of idealism appeared to coincide with this youthful nation's coming of age.

In fact, Israel's Declaration of Independence embodies many of the principles, values and ideals that all of us can and must embrace if we are to see a secure and prosperous Israel well into the future.

*“THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and*

*culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”*

Many historians and analysts have followed Israel's journey over these last seven decades. And, last year I traveled to Israel to commemorate one of the most important events— 50 years since the Six Day War and unfortunately, equally, 50 years of occupying another people, the Palestinians. Walking with others along the Green Line, the question posed itself: “Why today is the body politic of Israel, which for nearly 10 years has been led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, find itself so terribly far from the historic vision of Israel expressed 70 years ago? How has a nation gone from lofty idealism to cynicism and become mired in a seemingly never-ending and often-insincere search for a just and equitable peace between two peoples, the Israelis and Palestinians?”

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***Heart, mind, and soul – all forms of reasoning will be sharply challenged.***

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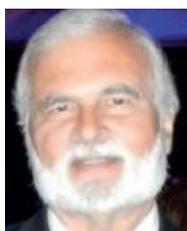
The PPI Symposia that I have been fortunate to participate in enabled all of us to engage in numerous and diverse forms of dialogue and learning-- from all perspectives. The Partners for Progressive Israel tour through Israel and Palestine provides a reasoned, responsible and well thought out approach for understanding and engagement, and maybe even helping to resolve the conflict.



We have visited an “illegal” Bedouin community in the Negev and Jewish settlements in the West Bank, stood on the border within yards of the Gaza Strip near the Peace Wall, listened to stories of those who have been forcibly removed from rocky patches of land on the outskirts of Hebron, and sat in on meetings with the highest leadership of the Knesset in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. And with immense compassion, we witnessed a military courtroom at Ofer Prison as a 12 year old Palestinian boy was placed on trial for throwing stones at the military. Heart, mind, and soul – all forms of reasoning will be sharply challenged.

PPI Symposia have been my way to begin to “learn and understand” the tensions and the opportunities that exist and could be brought into being between Israelis and Palestinians. We must all commit ourselves to a tenacious search for and promotion of a just peace. PPI and its Symposia do this honestly and pragmatically, with humanity, in friendship and fellowship, and with an appreciation of our common humanity. ■

*Steve Haze is District Manager at Sierra Resource Conservation District, Fresno County.*



## Partners for Progress Israel

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Partners for Progressive Israel  
invites you to raise a glass  
to our late friend & founder

## HAROLD SHAPIRO Z”L



### *Celebrating Harold*

an evening of music, poetry  
and 90 years of memories

Monday, March 5th, 7:30PM  
City Winery  
155 Varick St., New York City

Join us for a tribute to Harold, a man who worked  
for peace and justice, a man whose joyous spirit created  
friendships across boundaries.

In honor of Harold's enthusiastic support of artists  
an exciting array of actors, musicians and poets will perform  
weaving music, poetry and memories.



Funds raised will go to PPI's Harold Shapiro Memorial Fund

# Support African Asylum-Seekers in Israel!

PPI has joined the #LetUsHelp campaign, which is partnering with other Israeli and American organizations to stop the deportations. We urge you to sign the [#LetUsHelp](#) Pledge and to publicize this

campaign in every way you can. This is an issue that transcends Left and Right; it is a moral imperative for anyone who cares about Israel. More information on the issue as a whole can be found [here](#).



## Support African Asylum-Seekers in Israel!

You've probably seen articles about the polarizing arguments roiling Israel lately regarding the threatened mass deportation of African asylum-seekers in Israel, an issue that has come to a head in recent weeks. There are approximately 38,000 adults and 4000 children, mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, as well as smaller numbers from other countries in Africa. They justifiably fear imprisonment, torture and death if they return.

Israel's government calls them "infiltrators," and asserts they endanger Israel's security and threaten its Jewish nature. We feel these claims are absurd, given the numbers of immigrants. They are also accused of criminal activity, which has been largely refuted. They have been allowed to stay in the country until now, but generally not permitted to work.

Israel has now begun to issue notices that they will be "voluntarily" deported to 3rd countries, believed to be Rwanda and Uganda, or face incarceration indefinitely. They are being "outsourced" to these countries rather than being sent home because Israel is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which forbids repatriation of refugees if their lives will be at risk. However, there is no guarantee at all that they will not be sent back to their original homes once they arrive in Rwanda and/or Uganda.

Ironically, Israel was a major supporter of the creation of the Convention, in the wake of the Holocaust.

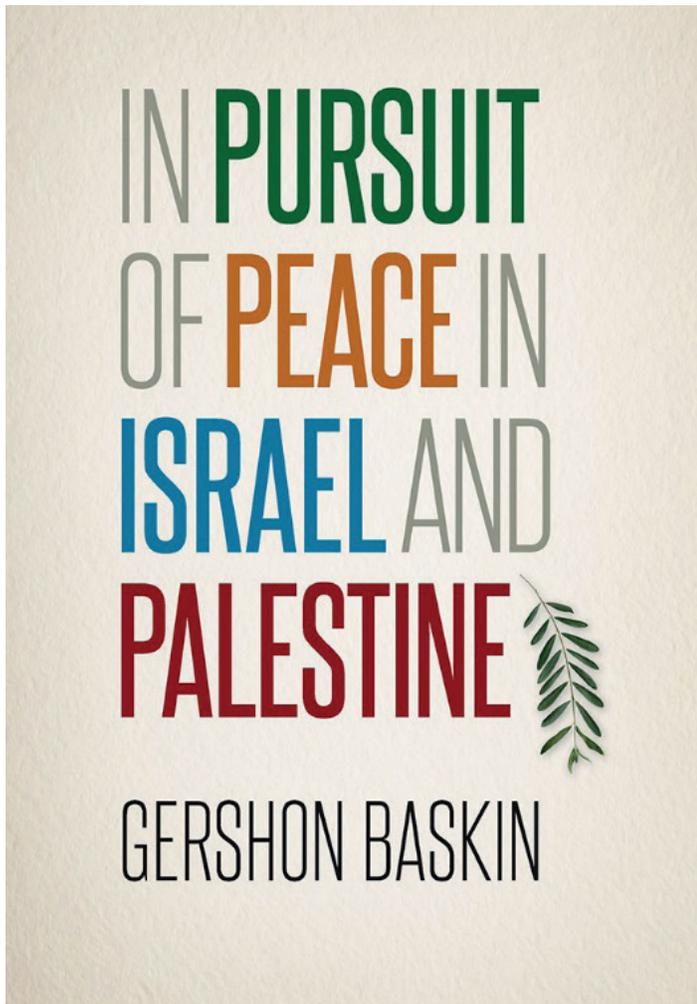
PPI has joined the #LetUsHelp campaign, which is partnering with other Israeli and American organizations to stop the deportations.

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# Gershon Baskin *In Pursuit of Peace in Israel and Palestine*, Vanderbilt University Press (Nashville, TN, 2017)

By Peter Eisenstadt



The blurb on the back of Gershon Baskin's *In Pursuit of Peace* claims the book is about the “world’s oldest conflict.” This is silly. Indeed, among longstanding ethnic/racial/ religious conflicts there is a strong argument to be made that the Israeli-Palestinian faceoff is among the world’s youngest, not taking on its present form until 1967, and in many ways not until after Sadat’s after visit to Jerusalem. But what Israel and the Palestinians have is the world’s oldest and most frustrating peace process. The term, from the beginning, was connected to Israel and its neighbors, and for all intents and purposes the first of its 6,500 or so appearances in the *New York Times* occurred on 17 October, 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, when Gershon Scholem, S.N Eisenstadt (no relation), and a host of Hebrew University luminaries stated in a letter to the paper, that “a peace process must mean mutual recognition, with peaceful

coexistence as its goal, achieved by free negotiations.” The more things change...

Gershon Baskin has been a part of the peace process almost from the beginning. Baskin was raised in the New York City area in the 1960s and 1970s, and like so many at the time, caught the left Zionist bug, made Aliyah in the late 1970s, and there he has remained. And he has dedicated his life to fostering Israeli-Palestinian understanding and political rapprochement. In 1988 he founded the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, a joint Israeli-Palestinian think - and, as he insists, “do” - tank, and he has remained a gadfly for peace, at once an insider and outsider, trusted by (some) officials on both sides as a negotiator. He is best known for his key role in negotiating the 2011 release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, but those (like me) who expected a recounting of his involvement with Shalit case in *In Pursuit of Peace* will be disappointed, since Baskin had already published his account in *The Negotiator: Freeing Gilad Shalit from Hamas* (2013.) Its absence, and the lack of any sustained discussion of Hamas and Gaza is missed in the present book, which is heavily weighted towards his interactions with Mahmoud Abbas and other PA officials, and his views on the status of the West Bank.

*In Pursuit of Peace* somewhat uncomfortably combines an autobiography with a political tract, but in the end the two parts of the book are reinforcing. His account of his life demonstrates his seriousness, his doggedness, and deep fairness to all parties, essential qualities for a negotiator. His searching discussions of the political situation make clear that for Baskin peace is not gauzy utopia, but something very concrete and detailed. And his argument is that the details are meaningless without a basic commitment to understanding the other, and understanding the other is meaningless without a commitment to sweat the details and nuances.

Baskin remains a proud member of the beleaguered band of what he calls the “tribe of liberal, peace-seeking Zionists.” Throughout his career, Baskin has dealt with the objection that he is a “naïve optimist,” which he rightly rebuts. The danger of “naïve realism,” particularly on the part of Israelis, believing that the current status quo can be extended indefinitely, is a far more prevalent mental error. Behind all of Baskin’s work is an underlying sense of the plasticity of

the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and that, appearances to the contrary, massive change is unavoidable, and it is the task of people like himself to steer the inevitable transformations in the best possible direction for everyone concerned. He has throughout his career tried to believe in the underlying good intentions of all parties, even when those good intentions seem to be quite well hidden. It seems to me that in recent years Baskin, as he describes, has had too much faith that the Netanyahu government has any serious interest in facilitating a peace process with Abbas and the Palestinians, and that there is a difference between being an optimist and being foolhardy, but his career is a rebuke to those on all sides who are comfortable with their cynicism.

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*“We are blessed, even if we don’t realize it, by having two peoples, two cultures, two societies, living in the same land.”*

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The most interesting parts of the book for me were the last chapters in which he lays out, in considerable detail, the outlines for a prospective two state solution. Some of this is familiar from various peace plans, such as the Israeli annexation of the settlement blocs near the Green Line, with appropriate land swaps. In other areas, too many to discuss in a short review, it is visionary in the concreteness of its imagined future. One thing such a solution will not bring, he wisely states, is any sort of finality. No Palestinian government, he cautions, will ever be able to extinguish the Palestinian right of return, and he suggests that every Palestinian refugee be given the right to have full citizenship in a country of their choice, including Israel. He is convinced that peace will not be lasting without permeable borders, in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Palestinians and Israelis would be able to freely cross the Green Line to visit but not to settle. Jews would be able to remain in the West Bank as citizens of a Palestinian state, though I wonder how that would work out. Would Jews, for instance, be able to make new land purchases in the Palestinian state?

There is currently much fashionable talk about the death of the two-state solution — talk that I, as a dedicated follower of fashion, am sympathetic to. Baskin will hear none of it. “There is no ‘one-state solution’ because it is not a solution that provides the warring parties with that territorial expression for which they have been so willing to fight.” We shall see. Baskin acknowledges that the auspices have not been encouraging in recent

years. He notes that after Abbas, support for the two-state solution is likely to plummet among Palestinians, and that the corrosive influence of Netanyahuism has greatly strengthened anti-two-state sentiments among Israelis. He has also, understandably, soured on the possibility that the good offices of the United States or any other country can help catalyze a solution.

Baskin remains, as he has been throughout his career, an advocate of secret, behind the scenes talks with the relevant parties, since the many explosive issues involved will not benefit by a premature airing. But all secret negotiations must at some point be brought before the public, and there are limits to how far negotiators can lead recalcitrant peoples to places to which they do not want to go. The truth is, as Baskin suggests, “for most Israelis and Palestinians, peace is actually unimaginable. They simply have no way how to conceptualize it.”

Baskin is fully aware that any peace negotiation that is merely top down, its results handed down like the ten commandments at Sinai, would not work. The only way for a two-state solution to work would be for Israelis and Palestinians to get to know each other better, more intimately, and to become much closer in their thoughts and aspirations than they currently are. If this sounds like drearily familiar advice, there is no alternative. Baskin rightly criticizes those, including many on the left, who see the two state solution as a kind of divorce. It will instead require a new sort of intimacy, a modern marriage between two fully equal and distinct partners. Whatever one’s opinion on what it is to be done, it will surely have to begin, as Baskin suggests, by the recognition by everyone concerned that “we are blessed, even if we don’t realize it, by having two peoples, two cultures, two societies, living in the same land.” In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Amen. ■

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*Peter Eisenstadt is a historian  
and a PPI board member*



# PPI collaboration with “Standing Together” in Chicago

By Liron David



In January, PPI collaborated with Prof. Dani Filc to present a new Jewish-Arab grass-root initiative in Israel to Chicago audiences. Called “Standing Together” (*Omdim B’Yachad*), this initiative was founded in 2015, to build a mass movement of Arabs and Jews for equality, peace, and justice. Standing Together attempts to create an activist-based, democratically operated movement, grounded in the principles of peace, equality, social justice and embodying socialist values.

Standing Together holds a holistic worldview and recognizes the interconnections of the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories, the growing social and economic disparities within Israeli society, and the attacks by the government on democratic freedoms and on the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel. It maintains that one cannot solve one of these problems without solving the others.

Through an understanding that the most effective way of creating social change in Israel is by having Jews and Arabs work together, Standing Together has provided a long-needed

platform and homebase for various progressive causes and struggles in Israel. Standing Together forges coalitions between groups and individual activists who have historically struggled for their causes alone, and models cooperation and partnership. There are several geographically based chapters. These chapters act locally and nationally through campaigns, educational activities and activism to promote and advance a more inclusive, equal and socially just society for all Israeli citizens, as well Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The core issues currently addressed by Standing together are 1) struggling for peace and an end to the Occupation, 2) defending democratic rights, 3) demanding equality, and 4) fighting for social and economic justice. Among other things, Standing Together is on the front line in the fight against Israeli government plans to deport thousands of asylum seekers from Israel.

In his visit to Chicago Professor Filc met with leaders in the Jewish community as well as young Jewish activists, leaders and students to explain the mission and goals of Standing Together, its activities and future strategy, as well as the complexities of the Israeli situation with which it needs to cope.

At another event that took place in Northwestern University, co-sponsored by J-Street U and PPI, students discussed the role of Standing Together in leftwing politics in Israel. Filc also met with young progressive activists in Chicago, to discuss the relationship between left movements in Israel and Palestine and the relations between external politics and Israeli government’s standpoint.

Some of the impressions expressed by the participants highlighted the need of young people in the US to learn and expose themselves to progressive voices and activist movements in Israel — precisely the need that Standing Together is trying to fill. Participants in the activists’ meeting, in particular, reported that it had a major impact on them. They said that they came to realize that a lot of their own work had been proceeding without knowing much about leftist organizations in Israel.

Dani Filc MD, Ph.D., is a Professor of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University. He finished medical school in 1983 at the University of Buenos Aires, and obtained

his Ph.D. in 2001 from the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, Tel Aviv University. His publications include *Hegemony and Populism in Israel* (Resling, Hebrew), *Circles of Exclusion: The Politics of Health-Care in Israel* (Cornell University Press) was the Chairman of Physicians for Human Rights – Israel. He is also a board member of Standing Together.

For more information about Standing Together, please visit their website:

<https://www.standing-together.org/standingtogether>

Partners for Progressive Israel supports talks, such as these in Chicago, that inform Americans about the work of Israeli progressive organizations. These NGOs promote the values of democracy, justice, and the equality of all Israeli citizens. PPI prides itself in forming partnerships between progressive Americans and progressive Israelis. ■



*Liron David, Israeli lawyer (LL.M) and social worker, is a PPI volunteer in Chicago area.*

## PPI MEET-UP AT J-STREET CONFERENCE

Over the last 10 years, the annual J-Street conference has become the place to be for the American Jewish moderate left. This year's will be in Washington D.C., April 14-17.

PPI will have a table there – and is also helping to organize a panel discussion with progressive Israeli organizations. We urge you to come and participate – and also to meet with PPI leaders and supporters. If you are planning to go, please let us know!

Send an email to [info@progressiveisrael.org](mailto:info@progressiveisrael.org) and we will notify you when we set a meet-up time and place.



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