**Interview with Former General**

**Commissioner of the Israel Police**

**Roni Alsheich**

**Beginning of transcription:**

Badi: Let’s start with a few questions. If you can, tell us a little bit about your background and how you became interested in police work. And how did you wind up as the number one police officer in Israel?

Roni: Well, I served for 27 years in the Israel Security Agency [ISA, formerly known as the Shin Bet]. Before that, I was in the military for eight years. That’s less relevant. But I spent 27 years in the ISA, starting in a primary field position and gradually becoming deputy director. Along the way, I was lucky enough to be able to lead a change in perception. And, basically, because of that change, all the work plans of the subdivisions engaged in counterterrorism had to become outcome-oriented.

 I’ll describe my experience there a little: I became the head of a counterterrorism subdivision, which basically includes all the professions. It’s a top-down division, with different professional departments, and it covers a large geographic area in which it has to carry out counterterrorism activity.At the peak of the Second Intifada, I came to the Samaria subdivision and discovered that all the heavy resources and technology of the larger organization were invested in this subdivision’s area. All the attention was there – the operational units had all their attention there. In every parameter of productivity, that division is in the lead, it’s number one. The Samaria subdivision has the most arrests, the most targeted killings, the most thwarts, the most cases, the most detainees, inputs, outputs – you’re “in heaven.” But the outcomes are the same all the time. Nothing changes on the terrorism curve. I asked the people in management: Doesn’t it bother you? Doesn’t it bother you that it’s like this? And they said: “Do you know what would have happened if we hadn’t done what we’re doing?” I told them: You’re right, obviously these efforts have some kind of effect. But if we don’t provide good service to the customer, and our customers are the citizens of Israel who want to be shot at less, blown up less, etc., if we don’t show them that we’re breaking that curve, then we’re not providing our service. They said: “But we’re working 24 hours a day.” So, it meant having to think differently about what we should do...It’s self-evident. Before I even knew what to call it, I knew intuitively what needed to be done, but it was completely obvious to me. At the end of the day, we can’t be in this position, unable to stop the curve of such an unreasonable level of terror, even though we are clearly the number one subdivision in terms of our level of outputs. But does it help the citizens? The citizens don’t care how many I’ve arrested, they don’t care about indictments; they don’t care about any of that. They care whether or not I provide them with this service; am I lowering the level of terror or not. That’s the dialogue we began.

 I’ll try to be brief. We also carried out internal processes on how to build a work plan that’s integrative for everyone, to develop goals from the bottom up by understanding the needs, and then prioritizing those goals. You have to prioritize the outcomes you want, because you can’t say, for example, “Next year there will be no suicide bombings.” It’s like saying nothing. If there are 26 attacks, then saying zero is like not saying anything. We need to start breaking it down. Let’s say zero attacks by Hamas, up to four attacks by Tanzim. Why? Because a Tanzim attack kills one or two people, while a Hamas attack kills between 10 and 15. So what does that change do? It helps with decisions along the line, because once we’re outcome-oriented, that will be given priority in investigations, in interceptions, etc. Ultimately, you want to create a situation [a goal] where the people at the bottom know how to figure out what to do from it; deduce something from it. You set the outcome goal, and everyone starts to get in sync.

Badi: It was already your job in the ISA, you...

Roni: That was my job in the ISA, the head of the subdivision at that stage. I actually set up my subdivision in the initial phase. I did it this way, because I wanted to emphasize other areas. Basically, we shifted gears to focus on the headquarters that sends out terrorists, rather than performing risk management on squads on their way to carry out attacks. It wasn’t easy, because there is a genuine risk. Everyone’s banging on the table all day saying: you take unreasonable risks, you’re crazy, etc. But there’s an elusive threat that you don’t see, so no one considers it. In fact, as long as you don’t address the foundations, it keeps generating terror squads. You’re fighting a machine that keeps shooting balls at you. That takes control away from you.

Badi: Roni, just an anecdote; this reminds those of us who work in policing of Goldstein’s distinction between “ends” and “means.” Organizations tend to focus on means and forget the purpose and end goal of the work, which, as you said, is protecting the citizens, not necessarily meeting pre-set goals.

Roni: Right. So, what happened? First of all, of course, there were terrific results, real achievements. It created synergy and synchronization among all the professional players, because they were all viewing the same results, instead of one person bringing these results and another bringing those results, each one on their own. Instead, there was synergy. The most important thing was that it became a common language spoken by all the counterterrorism subdivisions. It was passed on to all the geographical areas and adopted by them. It became the language of the whole organization, even in headquarters. What would you say the outcomes are for a headquarters unit? Headquarters has the role of drawing conclusions, assimilating lessons, conveying professional knowledge, maintaining its competence in field formations. How do you measure its outcomes? We would brainstorm. For example, we determined that one of the outcomes of a professional body or a professional array is how many recurring faults there are in the field – meaning attacks. If you know how to reduce the recurring faults, it’s an indication that you’re effective. Those are the outcomes that are expected of you. We went to every corner of the organization and thought about the right way to be outcome-oriented. This really created a revolution. Of course, this approach is very similar to the managerial notion of “lean management.” It addresses the theories of evidence-based policing.

 What is the weakness of the ISA? Its weakness is that it rarely documents its “blue” activity, the actions of our forces, because this requires tremendous investment and is considered a waste of resources. It wants to deal with the “reds.” When I got to the police force, I discovered that the police force intensely documents itself, even its “blue” activity, because it is legally obligated to document everything. But it doesn’t do anything with it. I told them: You have a gold mine here that no one else has. It doesn’t matter if you got it because the legal process requires it, you have a gold mine. We can start to see which “blue” activity results in which “red.” What affects what? What is the dependent variable? What is the independent variable? Let’s start with correlations, the most basic statistics in the world, correlations between the dependent and independent variables. If we say we are outcome-oriented, and the dependent variable is the “red,” then let’s look at which “blue” leads to which “red.” What creates the effect? This is something I was not able to do much at the ISA. At the ISA, we could see cumulative data on what we did, but I couldn’t follow the line of what contributed along the way. We only knew we were outcome-oriented. What’s the advantage of being outcome-oriented? If the outcome is not achieved, then everyone becomes eager to change the plan and add new inputs so that we can achieve the goal. Once I’m satisfied that we are achieving what we wanted to, then I can draw conclusions about the work. It’s a list of hypotheses. These are the hypotheses of independent variables that you’re supposed to infer from the dependent variable. If I don’t know how to measure whether I have indeed ended up there, then I have to identify the variable that creates the most impact. Once I can measure each line because it’s documented on a daily level, and I treat it as an actual sample, then I have enough. Because they [the police] are constantly documenting, I can arrive at a model of how to look at the “blue” and the “red” and the connections between them. You can start doing things, and forget about tests and all that… The most basic thing is evidence-based policing at the exploratory research level. Even if it hasn’t gone through all the formal tests – so you can’t write an academic paper about it – you have an indication that is very important at the field level, the level of your ability to consider and evaluate it.

 I should add that in between positions, I was studying for my MA, and because I had some extra time, so I studied criminology at the Hebrew University, even though my MA was in a different area. So I had enough intuition before I came into the office to try and realign.

Badi: Roni, tell us about the contribution of your criminology studies.

Roni: First of all it was dramatic, because when you learn the basics, you can tell what deterrence is, what works and what doesn’t. For example, you come to the police and they tell you about the “balloon effect,” which is a popular term for the displacement model. You can respond according to what studies have found. It doesn’t take you a year and a half to find out that this balloon is just a balloon; that’s nonsense. You can say that someone received an award for discovering that displacement doesn’t really exist in crime, or that it’s only partial. You understand the logic of this finding in criminology. You come with a toolbox that may be basic …you are not a criminology researcher, but you come with a basic set of insights into criminology. In your initial contact with the materials, you know the language, and the basic insights taught in criminology on the most fundamental level. So that’s the first level.

 Second, it gave me the idea to contact someone at the Hebrew University, in this case, Simon. I asked him, “Simon, send me the most up-to-date papers.” That way, I’d know what’s been happening in criminology since I stopped reading about it systematically. Simon told me: “It’s impractical to bombard you with papers, here’s one concise presentation.” It contained hundreds of slides but I studied it to see the essence of the latest valid and up-to-date criminological insights before I met with the police, so I could tell them what criminology has to say about what they’re doing. Since crime is one of the most researched topics, there is plenty of data, a lot of knowledge. I can’t ignore it and just ask the police officers what works and what doesn’t. You bring knowledge from the world. There are better police departments and ones that are not as good, but there is accumulated knowledge that is very useful. I knew I didn’t have much time, I had a total of one month to learn before I had to take command of the organization. It was crazy, but that was the situation. I decided that within 10 days I would come up with some idea of how to approach this. So, during those 10 days, I read the materials Simon sent me. Second, I met with the senior officers and asked questions so I would know how they work, what their perceptions were, and how far removed they were from what criminology says. I had vast experience with leading outcome-oriented policy, which can be related to the police. For me, the language of being outcome-oriented is important. Checking yourself against the results. Do you ultimately solve problems or not? In the case of the ISA, the result is preventing terrorist attacks. No matter what, it’s about experience, how to work, how to create a work plan. There are lots of skills and thinking that comes from already having dealt with the issues from many angles, along with being familiar with the various kinds of attacks, having knowledge of criminology, and being aware of what you encounter within the police force. I quickly realized that the model had to be based on everything I’d learned so far. First, what has the research found and verified? Second, how to take that and turn it into an organizationally practical model? Third, what IT support is needed so that it can work and not be cumbersome, not feed-intensive? What information sources do the police manage? Where are they located? At what resolution? It wasn’t very complicated because I already knew what I was looking for. I consulted with an external board that I set up for myself. We would meet every two days, and “spar.” I’d throw my ideas at them and get some feedback. At the end of the 10 days, I found myself sitting face-to-face with the deputy commissioners. I introduced them to my organizational ideas and heard their reactions. I was expecting an argument. I expected them to tell me, “You don’t understand, but this, but that...” That didn’t happen. They looked at me and said: “Wow, interesting.” I didn’t feel like someone was fighting me and telling me: “You don’t understand anything, it doesn’t work like that, it’s irrelevant, it’s relevant, etc.”

 Another thing I found to be beneficial is that the entire Israel Police – including the armed police – is under one command axis. Moreover, the Israel Police has one IT unit that provides service to the entire police force. This means that you can easily create one “desktop” that everyone works on. You then are able to make one rapid reform across the whole police force. You can use all the data about what happens at each of the stations in a single “data day” and learn quickly. It doesn’t take years. You don’t have to wait until an article comes out and then assimilate the information, which can take four years, and by then the General Commissioner has long since retired. You can produce something that can be learned quickly across the entire police force. For that to happen, without going through years of implementation, I decided that a police station would be assessed only according to this method [of studying the daily organizational data]. Period. That means a police station that wants to excel must excel in its outcomes. It must be defined as evidence-based policing. There was one thing I was hesitant about. People told me: “That sounds interesting, but it’s already December 2015, it’s impossible to start the 2016 work year already using this method. Let’s start learning in 2016, get everyone into this mindset, and then start working this way from 2017 onwards.” But I remembered from the presentation that Simon sent me that had to do with all the problems related to the police, the treatments and solutions derived, the outputs and the inputs you invest to make it happen – everything is at an extremely elementary level. It still works…

Simon: It’s better than nothing.

Roni: Right, it’s better than nothing. Then I said to myself, let’s not waste this year. It’s precious in the term of a General Commissioner. Let’s not waste this year. We assume that this year the results will be partial, but this year will be an experiment. It’s not that complicated to explain to people. We have plans that are not so sophisticated, and we can already start the learning process. So, there will be brilliant stations that will do amazing things, there will be mediocre stations, there will be weak stations, but overall, the organization will produce better results than it did last year. I said to myself: If the research supports it, let’s try it.

Badi: Roni, moving forward, we know your work from up close, but maybe you can give some background to people who are not familiar with what you have done. You’re describing how you began to implement all sorts of things. What did the police do before that?

Roni: Before, the police force measured success based on the idea that the most important thing is apprehending an offender. The General Commissioner fought a full-fledged war, even against the President of the Supreme Court, who told him that this approach wasn’t legally sound. But in fact, that’s the approach in the police force, and the police believe in it. There is a whole system managed according to this idea. There is a consulting firm being paid a lot of money that accompanies this process. Even though there had been no General Commissioner for six months, there was an acting General Commissioner, and they were still working under the old approach.

Badi: If I understood from you correctly, they didn’t follow evidence-based policing as you suggested...

Roni: The opposite.

Badi: They didn’t work according to the cutting edge in criminology and policing, correct?

Roni: Just the opposite. One, there was no connection with academia. What they were doing, in my humble opinion, was the antithesis of what the academic world says. Two, I felt morally uncomfortable, from a legal point of view, on this matter. Let me give you an example. An ultra-Orthodox applicant for military service from Bnei Brak wrote to me: “Mr. General Commissioner, I visited Jerusalem when terrorism was at its peak. I felt unsafe, so I spoke with friends, and I was told to buy brass knuckles. I bought brass knuckles and went to the Western Wall in Jerusalem. I went up to the security guard and innocently showed my keys, phone and brass knuckles at the security check. The security guard asked, ‘What’s with the brass knuckles?’ I told him, ‘I bought it because of the wave of terrorism.’ The security guard called a police officer, and the police officer opened a case against me for possession of a knife, an assault weapon. That’s why the IDF won’t enlist me.” That’s the letter I received.

Simon: It’s a good thing he wasn't detained until sentencing because...

Roni: Hold on, hold on. So, I tell my assistant: “Do me a favor and check whether this is some violent bully who beats up immodest women in Bnei Brak. Check this guy out and let’s see what his story is.” He gets back to me and tells me that there is nothing in the person’s file, no incidents, no record, no search by the police. But an indictment was filed against him. I said: “What???” He says: “Yes, an indictment was filed.” Now, I can say from what I know of the system, that after three, four months the case would have been closed and the indictment thrown out, and that’s it. There was no evidence and no defense either; I won’t get into the legal issue. But the police officer had met his quota. He could put a check mark by it, get a record of having made an easy indictment on his metrics regarding apprehending offenders … Why have they determined that they want to press charges for possession of a knife? Because there is violence. So someone thought that indictments for possession of a knife would lead to results. But if you ask the officer who handled it: “Tell me, what does this have to do with anything?” Theoretically, I understand that possession of a knife is relevant, but how does this specific event serve the desired outcome? It has already been forgotten. Why? Because he [the policeman] is being measured by the output. And when you measure him by the output, it moves away from the model quickly, in a tenth of a second. Because when you talk statistics with the police, every police officer can outsmart the statistics, and everyone knows how to ultimately bring in the numbers; you can influence it directly (inputs or outputs).

Badi: You are saying that, in effect, police officers are not given any discretion, but are target-oriented, that’s the direction?

Roni: Correct. So in the end, where does he go? He goes to places where no lawyer will chase him. This creates over-policing among vulnerable populations, riff-raffs who have no money to pay a lawyer or anything, and you make your police officers get involved with things like that. It’s like going at 2 a.m. to a stop sign in an industrial area and issuing tickets for running the stop sign. It has nothing to do with road accidents. True, this citizen has broken the law, and the ticket is legal, but it serves no purpose. There is no problem in wasting police resources and issuing tickets on something that does not reduce road accidents, it happens automatically, if you assess police officers by the number of tickets they issue... Let’s make an analogy to the pandemic. You enforce wearing masks. If you measure based on COVID tickets, what you get is a ticket issued to someone who came downstairs at 2 a.m. to the sidewalk two meters from his house, threw the trash out, and went home without putting his mask on. How does that serve the fight against COVID? It doesn’t. But the officer issued a ticket, and the ticket is legit. It easily gets away from you, when you deal with such outputs. That's the police force I found. A great belief in catching offenders. And this is the same police force that ended up, during the pandemic, without a General Commissioner to lead them with a better philosophy. What can we do? It wasn’t the first time I’ve come across that. It wasn’t my first experience of encountering a system that deals with outputs and is satisfied with that. In the end, you have to show them that you are not generating desirable results. Citizens want you to provide them with lower danger of criminal offenses; that’s what they want from you. They don't want break-ins. They want to be robbed less often, violently attacked less often, hear excessively loud noise less often, have their street blocked less often. Whether these are normative offenses or criminal offenses, people want to be exposed to fewer offenses. That’s your job as the police force. So it was relatively easy to convince the police officers to change for two reasons: One, ultimately, it makes sense, if you’re open-minded and you see the data on the real results, the kind of service you’re providing to the citizens. Two, it gives a lot of power to those at the bottom. It flattens the organization without taking anything away from the formal ranks. It flattens the organization because suddenly the goals don’t come from above and drop onto the station commander, who now has to show [outputs relating to] violence even if there is no violence, so he has to bring indictments for possession of a knife. He will find where to get [outputs]. But why did these targets come from the top? Because on top, there is violence, so you divide it up… No sir, at the police station, you are the king, you are the station commander. I can help you do surveys, hear what the citizens say, and that's fine. You can conduct interviews and meet with influencers, and meet with Sheikhs, and meet with community center directors, whoever is relevant. Then you will tell me: Here’s what I suggest addressing according to a prioritization that provides a true service to citizens, and you’ll prioritize: 1, 2, 3, that’s what I’m addressing. So he feels like a king, not only because I tell him: You choose what to do and we'll approve it, but [because] he initiated it. I tell him: Once we have determined what outcome achievements you are striving for, the plan is entirely flexible. You discover that a specific line of action is irrelevant? Delete it. You don’t have to tell me anything. You want to add another line to the work plan that you hadn’t thought of before but you saw it was working for someone else? Then pick up the phone to whoever manages the files and ask them to add this line to your work plan. From the moment you do that, you are the king, you are the police. You want to do third-party [beneficiaries] because you have a rich municipality? Do it. If you have a municipality with no resources and need to invent something else? I will not dictate to you from above what to do and what not to do. You have a crazy partner? A great community center director that you can get on board? Get them on board. There’s a social counselor on your streets, I don’t know what, get them on board; you’re the king. Just generate the outcome. That is what I want from you.

Simon: I think we often see – and Roni tell me if this is the way it is – when you ask police officers what their job is, they say to catch criminals. But they forget that under the police ordinance, their first purpose is crime prevention. They forget about crime prevention. So this is exactly what you are describing. They hardly engage in prevention –they just want to catch offenders. What you are saying is that the goal is prevention, first and foremost.

Roni: Right. And I presented that concept [of crime prevention] from the beginning. I entered office on Thursday, and on Sunday there was already a conference attended by 500 officers, chief superintendents and higher-ups, and I presented that concept. I hadn't named it EMUN yet *[note: acronym for Hebrew term: Logistics Operations and Assets Division]*. There was no system in place yet, but I presented the concept, how it relates to public trust, how it relates to police officer values, the overall perspective. And I called it the “perception of police operations,” because I didn’t want to call it “a new perception of the role of police,” because it seemed a little rude that, during my first week as a chief of police who came from outside the system, I would come and tell them what the police’s role is. When I finished the presentation, which was about two hours long, we went outside. Two officers approached me and told me: “Sir, you presented a different perception of the role of the police.” I told them: You’re right. They understood that it would change the whole setup of the police officers’ mindset, and, therefore, that of the police force. You don’t know the end of your journey as a General Commissioner, but you want to dramatically improve the chance that police officers who are out there at 2 a.m. with no commander nearby, and certainly not the General Commissioner, will know what they’re doing, and will do the right thing. If a police officer is assessed by the criteria that he thinks he should he be assessed by, then there’s a better chance that the officer will do the right thing. Because if I need to watch over someone, which tickets he gave and where… Let’s say we thought that a particular offense causes road accidents. If I have to constantly put a police officer out there to watch over another police officer, we’d get nowhere. If the police officer knows that he has no chance of advancing unless he has reduced the bottom-line number of car accidents, then he’ll always be looking for ways to do that. Then the relevant commander is constantly watching: Did it work? Didn’t it work? Let’s do it this way, let’s do it that way, He is always looking at the outcomes. He can’t just sit there and say: What a terrific plan we've put together, we’ve passed it, now let's just follow the lines of the plan. Because if, in the end, there is no result, it’s a waste of time.

 Here’s a great example – one of the most annoying offenses is theft of cellphones at the beach. No one goes into the sea with their cellphone, so they hide it in a towel and all kinds of other tricks. Then the offender comes, takes everything, and disappears. How many police officers can you put on something like that? A station commander asks one thing: Am I being evaluated by the outcome? Do I have a rich municipality? He goes to the Tel Aviv municipality and asks to install lockers with a camera. In response, they put up a gazebo where people can complain or contact a police officer without going to the police station. One police officer sits there during the day in beach season, we have a deal. [You can] put up a sign [saying] “joint venture with the Israel Police” because the mayor also wants [in on it], no problem. So, that’s what he does. In a situation when he is evaluated by the outputs, he brings pictures of the lockers to the annual Zoom meeting to show how good he is, how he installed lockers, look at that, video images and everything. But in a situation where the organization measures results, he knows that the images won’t be enough. They want to see fewer cellphones were stolen, that’s what they want, nothing else. He understands that if his hypothesis is that lockers will reduce thefts, it needs to be proven. So, first thing after he installs the lockers, he goes down to the beach and he finds out half of the lockers are not in use although the beach is full. He asks people: “Why don’t you use the lockers?” And they say because the municipality takes five shekels every time a locker is opened and closed. The station commander understands that this is his responsibility. He wants to succeed. So he goes to the municipality and puts up a fight and tells them: with all due respect, we didn’t install the lockers so you can make money, we installed them to serve the citizens. They reach an agreement that the first three hours will cost five shekels, and after that every time you open and close the locker, it costs five shekels. He realizes that this won’t do him any good either if it doesn’t lead to a drop in thefts. It’s pointless to tell stories. It’s all nice and creative, but it’s not worth anything if it doesn’t lead to a drop in thefts at the beach. So this dynamic produces a different kind of police officer who is looking at completely different things, and is aware that he is constantly being watched and evaluated. He can tell you what the situation is today compared to this time last year. It isn’t over, you don’t win in a day, you’re always at war. To reach, let’s say, the 40% drop in thefts we want, you have to work at it all the time. But it’s interesting, you are also king as station commander. We have given you an exceptional level of decentralization. In the end, the citizens benefit from this.

Badi: Roni, we started talking about the EMUN reform without giving an introduction. What are the foundations of this EMUN reform that you created?

Roni: We’ve integrated all the proven research insights into it. First, it’s the story of problem-solving policing, which is outcome-oriented. Second, it’s hot spots, location-oriented policing. We realized we didn’t believe in displacement, so instead, we talk about hot spots. You target them and cool them off, you get results. True, it’s an endless chase, because no one knows how to make crime triggers vanish, but, in the end, you have to gain in this chase. You need to be constantly focused on the hot spots, because your resources are scarce and need to be focused. So there you have it, location-oriented policing. Third is situational prevention. This touches on other things, but it is a topic that was developed on a theoretical level and stands on its own. We have created a situation whereby situational prevention will be the mindset of the entire organization, not just in the local mindset. I’ll explain. It could be that lockers on the beach are situational prevention. But cellphones are stolen in all sorts of other situations. We wanted the whole organization to try to contribute to this situational prevention mindset. So, I appoint an officer whose job it is to generate organizational tools for situational prevention. We realize that we ultimately needed to address both sides, demand as well as supply. If you want to lower the number of cellphone thefts, then a stolen cellphone must be less attractive. So, after a struggle that lasted an entire year with the Ministry of Communications, we convinced the Director General that as soon as someone reports the loss or theft of a cellphone, their provider must disconnect both the SIM number and the IMEI number [serial number of the phone itself], inform the other phone companies that it is a stolen or lost IMEI, and then they must also disconnect the IMEI. Then, a cellphone that costs 3500 shekels new, that was once worth 900 shekels after it was stolen, now becomes worth only 50 shekels. That means that we reduced theft at the macro level, and not only at the location level. Situational prevention is a kind of organizational perception that constantly seeks to attack major offenses, not only at the location, but in a broad view. … Every Thursday we would go over the offenses, looking at how many cellphones were stolen that week. Someone would say that the weekly number across the entire country now was once the weekly number in the city of Bat Yam. So, ultimately, situational prevention goes beyond this focused model of EMUN. It is a perception that says: Let’s create lateral prevention. I’ll give you another example. Let’s say we suddenly saw that, at the national level, and especially in the Tel Aviv area, date rape drugs are being used a lot or are suspected in many cases. That means that girls wake up in all sorts of places, not knowing how they got there, and the use of date-rape drugs is suspected. They evaporate very quickly from the body and cannot be proven. We said we will not wait for this to reach Eilat or the alcohol district in Zebulon. Trends that start in Tel Aviv later spread everywhere. So on New Year’s Eve, we set up stations. First, we tested kits for testing date-rape drugs. We checked with forensics to see what really works. We checked a kit, converted it into a reliable one that passed forensics, translated the instructions into Hebrew. You dip your finger in the glass and put your finger on the dot on the envelope. You have two opportunities on each page. If it turns blue, call the police. We handed out these kits for free in all the clubs, and launched an educational campaign with videos. Because we control the licensing of the clubs, they had to show the videos about the date-rape prevention kits. For many months, we did not have a single complaint about suspected use of date-rape drugs. Because basically, what did we tell the criminals? The incredible ease with which this offense could be committed at a club – I just took that away from you. Because you might not know who to get a kit from, the mother took one, friends took one, so we handed them out for free. It was much cheaper than to handle cases later, after the fact. So, here’s an example of something that isn’t just a location. But when we talk about situational prevention, then, of course, it’s on the local level, but we’ve also gone up to broader levels to solve problems on a more widespread scale, to help the station commanders, each in their own area, generate the result. What other element? We said situational prevention, we said problem-solving, location-oriented…

Badi: The community matter...

Roni: Right, of course, community policing. So, in research on community policing, there are some positive indications, at least according to the presentations, and I believe it hasn’t changed dramatically since then. But it’s unfounded because one study says one thing, and another says another. Why did we put it community policing into the model, then? For several reasons. First, it is important for public trust. So even if it doesn’t directly affect the outcome, it is important because when I ask the citizens what they want, [community policing] builds public trust in the police. Second, when I talk about value to the customer, I want to consult with the community, so here, the community has third-party policing resources that they can use. And it is proven in studies that this input ultimately generates the result. That is why we said: Let’s take it as a component, also for problem selection. Before I decide what outcomes I am currently striving for, or what problems I’m striving to solve, to use criminological jargon. In terms of the inclusion of the community throughout [the process], and the division of the work on assignments, between community policing and this, we have reached a point where the station commanders tell me – and in my opinion this is a very important accomplishment – that one good community police officer is worth two special patrol units. If that is what a station commander tells you, then he understands what community policing is. He understands its value if he makes such a statement. Because everyone keeps telling me: Give me a special patrol unit, give him a special patrol unit. But ultimately, when he tells you a community police officer is worth two special patrol units, it’s an indication that he has started to know how to work with it. And we added the community into the mix, we said: Let’s integrate it. Suppose I take all these elements that the research says works. In that case, you say: Let’s build a single model, a single work process that will be the core of classic policing. Basically, it is a process that embodies each of these research insights and integrates them into something coherent. Then we said: Each station will choose the problems it will solve. How will it do that? First, we provide a statistical survey for it. Then every commander involves the entire relevant community. Because each has a different kind of community. We live in a diverse country. An ultra-Orthodox person is unlike an Arab, an Arab is unlike a Jew in north Tel Aviv. Dimona is not Hadera, Hadera is not a Bedouin village in the Negev, and so on. Each has its own complexities. You say: Focus on your own station. It’s incredible to see. For instance, in the first session of the program’s classes, a police station commander said: We want to solve the noise problems in Caesarea. I asked: What noise problems are there in Caesarea? I was told there was gunfire at Jiser al-Zarqa that was creating noise in Caesarea. I said: Excuse me? Maybe we should solve the gunfire problem there, it is killing people, whereas in Caesarea, maybe someone can’t fall asleep…

Simon: It’s important to emphasize that it is the same station.

Roni: I insisted on facilitating flexibility. For example, there’s something that was initiated by one of the commissioners, a few commissioners ago, that is called *Nahshol* (the Wave). What’s *Nahshol*? You bring the entire force of a station together, all the motor-cops, from across the station area at the beginning of every shift. “Here we are.” Excellent. Now some people were great believers in it. To me, it seemed terribly wasteful in terms of resources, impossible, because it does not allow you to regulate your resources according to the development of crime during the shift, at the most relevant and less relevant hours, for all sorts of reasons

Simon: When I was a young officer in the police force they called it, “drops of sweat.”

Roni: I was told it was called *Nahshol*. So I said: Look, I don’t believe in this, but I am not an experienced police officer. No problem, put it in the program. If someone believes in it, put it in. Because ultimately, you will get feedback from the system on whether or not it correlates with the outcome. I’m convinced you’re intelligent enough that as soon as you see that there is no correlation with the outcome, you will take this resource and move it to a different and more effective line. That is why we didn’t come and say: Gentlemen, this is dumb, don’t do it, I am the General Commissioner, I decide. You believe in it? Put it in. But just know that to be an outstanding station you need to drop 40% here, 35% here, 40% there, good luck. Do you believe in your plan? Good luck. As long as you work legally, go and good luck. You have complete flexibility. Moreover, once we build a system where I can see everything, I can see maps of the entire police force’s effectiveness across each of the offenses. So I look at who is the best outside the polygon, inside the polygon [representing the hot spot]. I look and say: Who is similar to me as a station? Urban or not urban? I will not copy someone whose structure is different. I’m in Hadera, they’re in Netanya. Let’s check, let's go into my colleague’s plan and see what they have, check whether I have these kinds of resources. Maybe I do not have this partner, maybe I do not have these resources at the station, my station is poor. Anything is possible. If I do [have the resources]? Excellent. Check if it works. What is its correlation is with the outcome? Suddenly, you see a rapid rate of learning. Why? Because instead of bringing to everyone’s attention this works and that doesn’t, and they won’t remember half of it, they have all the information in front of them. They know if something isn’t working. They remember that it doesn’t work. When they try to solve a particular problem, they will check it in the organization. Now, it’s true that when they embark on the planning, the strategy department helps them. Do you have noise issues? From our experience, this works, this doesn’t work. That’s how it is in the police force. Forget research from around the world for a moment…

Badi: There’s experience, sure.

Roni: This is our experience. It may be that our geographical area is unlike anything else, but just know that this is our experience; the macro statistics never lie. Then they [station commanders] set off with what they found. They are constantly looking. They don't need permission from anybody. Everything is transparent. They are allowed to copy. It is entirely legal. There’s no competition over who copied more lines or fewer lines. There’s competition over the outcome. They know that, in the end, you cannot excel and be an outstanding station without generating the outcome. So, they are constantly going crazy for the outcome.

Badi: I want to summarize before we continue, what you’ve built is a science-based plan, based on facts, on proven strategies. You’ve built a plan that measures with transparency. It is user-friendly for the people, the commanders in the field. It has also helped you as the chief of police to see the big picture and make decisions according to the results. That’s what happened, right?

Roni: Correct. And it also allows you to see deeply. You are visiting the station, you look into the system for a moment, you can see if, for example, if they’re getting resources for something that’s not working. You can see whether they’re thinking correctly or not. You don’t want to run the station for them, but they already know that during your visit, you will ask all kinds of questions. What is happening? They ask each other what happened during the visit, what he did he ask about, what was he interested in. You push the learning with tremendous speed because everyone wants to come off okay. To come off okay, they have to devote time to thinking, so that they don’t suddenly show that they're reaching 100% on some line that has long since been proven to do nothing.

Badi: The beauty of this plan is that officers can look at their colleagues’ plans, they have ongoing information. You are constantly learning about what worked, and that’s a wonderful program.

Simon: I wanted to continue from this point. Badi started by saying there was this concept of the evidence-based cop. This refers to a practitioner or person appointed by the General Commissioner as the person responsible for introducing evidence-based policing to the police force. Based on that, the police force attempts to create an evidence-based revolution. What Badi started to tell you was that in our report, we analyzed your case and concluded that there is a different situation here, since the evidence-based cop is actually you, the General Commissioner. That’s a whole different story. Why? Because when the General Commissioner is the ultimate evidence-based cop, then, as you’ve just explained, the learning process is different. It is not someone the General Commissioner has appointed; it is the General Commissioner himself! And as you’ve said, because they know you’ll be paying a visit to the police station and asking questions, they already carry out this whole process. Could you elaborate on the experience of the General Commissioner being the one who’s responsible for the reform and the process of evidence-based policing, compared to what happens when the General Commissioner is not the one who leads, but supports the process, bringing in people to carry out the process, bringing in consultants, criminologists, police officers? … When it’s the chief of police’s own baby… If you could say a few words about that.

Roni: I’ll give you an example. Every year, some stations excel and naturally want to put up a fight: besides the outcomes, we want to leverage being the most “creative” station, we want to leverage being the most “communal” station...The second you deviate from the model, not because you decided you don’t want evidence-based policing, but because there is something other than evidence-based policing, you could lose the whole battle. When you are leading a revolution, you don’t want it to come off the table for a single moment. If the General Commissioner isn’t leading it, there is no end. They can make a decision, the General Commissioner will approve it, and from that moment on, the organizational relationship is diverted. Alternatively, there were regional and district targets, which, of course, competed with the stations’ targets. You have to say: If I move away from evidence-based policing, I will produce something that is peripheral to the organization. I must make sure this doesn’t happen. The regional commander is evaluated by the average of its stations'’achievements. Moreover, the General Commissioner allocates special time for discussion of EMUN around the table with the most senior [commanders]. Every status discussion increases the competition between the districts, according to the graphs. If I see that as a district commander, I am the fourth or fifth district in terms of my averages, I start to tell myself, go home. I have to do something, because no one wants to be in last place. Once it’s the General Commissioner, there’s no angle you can look at it from that lets this escape. It gets their attention. Because, at the end of the day, it’s your baby. You understand, it’s giving appreciation to the police. It’s difficult to make you deviate. If there is some kind of advisor, the General Commissioner can make a pretty reasonable decision regarding [awarding them for being] a communal station, creative station, etc. I agreed, in the second year, to do that, but I said that only stations that got 100% on all goals can compete. Once someone has gotten 100% on all goals, I am willing to give them an award for creativity. But if they haven’t generated the outcomes, they are out of the competition for being creative or communal. Because creativity doesn’t lead to results, thank you. We are in customer service. The fact is, you know how to maintain it properly because you are leading it. It’s terribly hard to hide something that contradicts the planfrom the General Commissioner. A dynamic state of competition is created between the area commanders on how to integrate within trust-building. All of a sudden, you come to visit the area, and the regional commander has to be ready; what are their inputs? There are regional commanders who said, “I was approving plans when I saw that a location-oriented polygon was chosen to deal with a problem, but it is too close to another polygon of a different station, and we basically are wasting resources. I want this station to take this polygon, another will choose another polygon somewhere else that is also a hot spot. It may be a bit less important than this polygon, but let this polygon get a free outcome, and in the end, I integrate my entire area.” So, where do I stand, as an area commander? How do I understand the stations’ EMUN plans and integrate them? If an area commander is busy with something else, the first thing they do is take resources from the station to achieve their goals. Each of them is busy with something else, and the station is alone in facing the General Commissioner, or the consultant or who developed this plan. Once you keep in mind all the implications and realize that a good police force is one that does evidence-based policing, you don’t let anything threaten this model. It’s more than that. There is high-level policing. How do you synchronize between high-level policing and classic policing? They “talk” to each other. High-level policing talks about the offenders, classic policing talks about the offenses. So what’s the tool that synchronizes them? You have to keep everything in mind, so each consultant doesn’t deal with something else without connecting or integrating. When you look at the big picture, you can say: I am now making a change in the area of high-level policing and there is no contradiction; on the contrary, it synchronizes with the policing at the bottom – great. Can we say that it’s always possible to produce such a result? I don’t know. It is possible to create situations in which a General Commissioner will be the one who went through this process. It could be that if we educate [future] generations so that everyone will study criminology, and no one comes here without an MA in criminology, then I assume it can be achieved. There’s no doubt that it has value. You just can’t be sold on it. Everything the strategy department offers must fit into these strategic directions. You can see the big picture from your desk, you don’t need anyone’s help. You just look for a moment, and see how things are. You see who’s doing the work and who isn’t. If you see someone investing resources in something that isn’t working, you know they don’t understand the model. And you see the joyful creativity this produces… It’s unbelievable.

 Do you know the story about the benches? There were two benches in front of three buildings, and there would be between 10–15 calls about disturbing the peace every evening. Police cars were constantly sent about it. Noise, broken bottles, drunks, even a stabbing incident once. The station commander said: “Wait, am I referring to the outcome of these disturbances?” Intuitively, I’d say let’s remove the benches. But the benches aren’t hers; they belong to the municipality, so she can do third-party policing before she goes to the municipality. She said: “Let’s take a moment to look at what’s going on at these benches during the day.” The patrol returned and told her that senior citizens sit on the benches and enjoy the garden in the morning. Should we take the benches away from them? For three weeks, the benches were disassembled every evening and re-assembled every morning. Of course, that is investment-intensive. During those three weeks, they developed a mechanism that doesn’t allow people to sit on the benches at night, but in the morning, by turning a key, it unfolds, and people can sit on the bench. Then she asked: “Am I being assessed based on noise nuisance offenses? These young people need to make some noise. Noise is more of an issue than displacement, than crime. Young people make noise; if they don’t make noise here, they will make it there. I need to allow noise someplace that it doesn’t disturb the citizens, because it is not as if I have resolved the problem here.” She was looking at the macro level on situational prevention. She took it up with the municipality. She didn’t go to the General Commissioner. She did everything. That’s the mechanism that was created. She brought in an acoustic engineer to analyze the park, marked an area inside it where no noise reaches the nearby buildings. During the summer, they even brought beanbag chairs, a counselor, music, etc. She went the extra distance, because she realized that she was being measured by outcomes and service to the citizens. Do you understand what satisfaction that produces for this station? What a feeling it is to actually provide a service, not only to those who aren’t bothered by the noise now, but to those who deserve to give their vocal cords a bit of a workout so they can later become MKs. So, she allows them to make noise without breaking the law. That’s the kind of thing where you say: No one can sit at HQ and invent it. Only those who are at the bottom know what they’ve got and what they haven’t got, and how to utilize their resources, thanks to the fact that they are measured only by the outcome.

Simon: Unfortunately, your appointment ended after three years. So what happens after an evidence-based cop leaves? That’s the tricky question. The first thing you did was to create a learning process. Now anyone who attends the Command & Staff course or the officer training course must come to the Criminology Institute to learn. As a result, they are already learning evidence-based policing. But we’ll have to see how much control there is after the evidence-based cop leaves the organization. What remains, what doesn’t? What needs to happen so that as much of your experience as possible will remain after you’ve left?

Badi: Simon, perhaps as an introduction to this question, did everything you just told us about work, Roni?

Roni: It worked amazingly. Look at how we measured it. We took each of the offenses and put it on the graph. We put each station on the graph. We put the organizational averages on the graph. In other words, what is the average score that the Israel Police receives for noise nuisance offenses? All this is according to the EMUN system. What is the average score that the Israel Police receives for burglary offenses, and so on? We put everything on the graph, outside the polygon and inside the polygon. And you actually see [gestures with his hand an upward trend over the years]. That’s what we had in 2016, 2017, 2018. Clearly the improvement between 2016 and 2017 was more significant, but the improvement from 2017 to 2018 was still an improvement. Now, this is an organizational average that includes those who don’t succeed or are partially successful, or only a little. And the organizational average is an improvement of over 100% inside and outside the polygon. That means some stations achieved 150% and some less. The average is above 100%. So, if we need a 40% drop in noise, then they delivered that 40%. They delivered what was required outside the polygon. And the average of the whole organization in 2018 reached over 100%. That means it works. Not only does it work, you see consistent learning. There is no offense for which we haven’t seen this dynamic. Are we done? Of course not. We need to continue to raise the bar.

 Now let’s talk about the crisis. Unfortunately, there was no General Commissioner after me. The deputy commissioners saw that the acting chief of police was trying, with no evil intention, to implement an input that contradicted the model. They fought him. But after he leaves, and after another five or six deputy commissioners leave, and the organizational knowledge is lost, I can’t say that the model can be preserved at the same level of insight. I don’t know to what extent, but I guess you can’t, because the model hasn’t been around for enough years to have station commanders sit around the table and have it made permanent. So far, that isn’t happening. I will give you an example. I know that during his first year, the acting chief of police said: Let’s go back to assessing by indictments. We will not break the EMUN model, but let’s measure indictments. Someone should have told him: Do you understand that you have abandoned the model if you are measuring indictments? You can’t measure them within the model. It’s either one or the other.

Badi: It’s anti.

Roni: Exactly. It is the opposite of the insights from criminology. Some people jumped on him for that. If today there would be people who would contradict a General Commissioner, who would say: Come on, the chances of offenders being caught, indictments… a police force full of fighters. I’m not sure there is enough deep knowledge around the table that people will know how to contradict him and say: the moment you introduce such a thing, you’ve broken the evidence-based policing model. To say that, it really has to have become an organizational language. We have to get to the point where station commanders know the language. That takes at least 10 years.

Badi: So maybe we will move on to Simon’s question. Earlier you described in detail how you institutionalized the reform in the Israel Police. You got to a point where there were some 70 police stations, including districts and areas, that understand your vision and implemented it. You did this based on a computerized, transparent, evidence-based system and a valid, logical plan. Wonderful. This was the big vision, the ultimate implementation, with impressive results, some of which we will talk about soon. But then there is the question of the day after. For you, as former General Commissioner, this is the story of concretizing the work. Your response, it seems, is that no matter how successful you are, once your term in office is over, even though the institutionalization on the daily level deserves respect, the concretization of the ideology and philosophy is in doubt.

Roni: It’s true. Had it not been for that situation in which there was no General Commissioner for two years, had some normal continuity been created, then far fewer people would have left the discussion about language. Continuity is maintained, even if it is only 80% maintained. It is a pity, but in this case, for a year and a half, two years, there was no General Commissioner. Then people left again; someone was finally appointed after two-and-a-half years. I don’t think you can draw conclusions from this, but for every reform that is carried out, even in a healthy organizational situation with no improper involvement, and so on, because it is obvious that …. if someone leads something, it later fades. Let me give you an example. I carried out this reform in the ISA, and it remains to this day. In the farewell meeting held at the ISA when I left to become General Commissioner, they presented the status of each of the reforms I had led in the ISA, and how far these reforms had come by that time… When I left, they were at much less advanced stages than they are today. Why? Because basically, the organization had continuity. It wasn’t in any crisis. People believed in what we had started. Also, we’re not talking about a year or two. Say we started something in 2003 and I left the ISA in 2015, so some of the reforms had been running for a good few years. Bottom line, this an example of what they decided to present. In a healthy organization that is not undergoing crises, could something still fade, something that is less ideologically strong? For example, some officers met me last year and said: Do you remember you did administrative work for some reform in 2010? Now we are launching it. It was ahead of its time. Perhaps if I had stayed in the organization, it would have happened earlier. But in a healthy organization, reforms that are not a flop in one year but have been going for several years, their 80% [maintainence] isn’t harmed. It becomes part of the organizational culture. In our case, unfortunately, this is an unusual example.

Badi: To summarize this insight, as successful as evidence-based policing may be, if it is threatened by instability and inconsistency, if the theory isn’t passed down from one generation to the next, it will erode. This is true for many organizations, and one example is the Israel Police.

 Roni, you said earlier that from your own analysis and that of the people who are in charge of the data [in the police force], you saw that, ostensibly, the reform seems to be successful. But you chose to order an external evaluation by people outside the police force to tell you whether or not this reform was working. Can you tell us why you did that?

Roni: When a person talks about a reform as short as three years, it may be that we are congratulating ourselves on initial results. We don’t recognize why it works better in one place and not as well in another, and so on. The research tools that are able to isolate the data and produce something that meets academic standards are no substitute for the exploratory research we do, and the “ongoing” where we follow ourselves and the data that we analyze to make decisions. Neither one replaces the other. First, you want to make your system more sophisticated. It does very basic statistical analyses. It doesn’t even run a regression model. It checks correlations, does very basic things, but it isn’t validated by ongoing research. You want the research validation to learn what your “ongoing” doesn’t teach you. Second, in my opinion, when an academic study is published finding that the police reform has been validated, that is part of what creates public trust in the police force. With all due respect to what the General Commissioner or police reporters say, when a criminology institute publishes a paper and researchers, professionals, Stockholm Prize winners, give it their blessing, this is important to creating public trust in the police force. Now, obviously, there’s a risk; academic research might say it was a flop. Something specific wasn’t successful, doesn’t work, or only works partially. Everything has its risk. But if you based your model on the findings of criminology research, so it is not so risky…

Badi: When [criminologist] David Weisburd went to the chief of police in New York, he told him he could always tell him bad news…

Simon: That takes courage.

Roni: You need courage. You need to see that what you are doing is really based on research, that you didn’t just make it up. You took the research insights and managerially integrated them and performed IT integration and statistics. You rely on articles and studies that have academic validity. If you are convinced that what you’ve done is in good faith and was established, to the best of your ability, on the research, then the chances of something catastrophic coming out of it is probably not high. So you ask, what can I learn from it? Obviously, there is a risk. If someone writes a paper with reservations on page 8, then someone else can take that reservation and make it the main point. That’s true. But if you have confidence in what you do and believe in what you do, then, that’s part of the deal. Today, when everything about the organization is transparent anyway, that only brings you power. I can’t hide the annual statistical report published by the police. Whoever wants to can see the data. So, if the data is good, it’s good; if it’s bad, then it’s bad. What good will it do me to hide it? That’s why, at the end of the day, when everyone understands that there is transparency and there is an advisory board, and that academics from all the universities hear it and criticize, it is only beneficial in the end.

Badi: Roni, to clarify what you just said – not only did you order an external academic study that examined the police force’s work and open it to review by an external party, but you also built a national advisory board and a national academic advisory forum. You invited academics to consult with you on general and specific issues in your work. You saw the connection with the academic community as important and strategic.

Roni: Of course! First of all, the brains aren’t only in the field, although there are plenty of brains in the field. Sometimes academia’s problem is getting data and information from the field. It’s not that they lack intelligence; they lack information. If you want to progress, you have to be open. You can’t hold your cards close to your chest and still enjoy the intelligent input of others who have experience in police forces around the world and everything that has been written about them. You can’t eat your cake and have it whole, too. I realized that. It does come with a price. There are no free lunches. But I think it served its purpose. I felt much safer… Let’s say we are going into policing in the Arab sector, and I see a paper on the fit between the EMUN model’s perspective and the need for policing or for more appropriate policing in the Arab sector. Now I’m on more solid ground than just my intuition that it would work in the Arab sector as well. That’s why I say there are no free lunches. I’ve always believed in academia. When I was in the ISA, I put a lot of effort into making the connection, even in things I was not responsible for. Simon knows all the adventures of our attempts to connect with academia regarding much more sensitive information than data on crime … I believe in it. Everyone has their strong points, and this connection between the offline and online is a power multiplier.

Badi: Last question Roni. We are in this unique chapter, and we want to ask whether you have a message or recommendations for chiefs of police around the world who want to be like you, evidence-based police. What would you tell them? What is your credo? What dos and don’ts would you offer to a new General Commissioner?

Roni: I think you should resist intuitive insights if they contradict academic research. That’s hard work, because police officers with 30 years of experience have intuitive insights, passed on from one to another, that are often the absolute antithesis of the research. It is terribly difficult to break away from them. Once a person says: I’ve decided that if studies say the opposite, then I won’t follow my intuition for any reason, then I think that person has opened the door to accepting intelligence that is founded on knowledge, and has a chance to achieve evidence-based policing. How did I come to this conclusion? After all, I wasn’t a cop for 30 years. But if you hear four police officers with 30 years of experience, and each of them says something else, you realize something’s wrong. They can’t all be right, if each of the four say different things. That’s why you need to step away from it for a moment, and realize that, in your 30 years, you have worked in eight geographical areas. Now take the whole world full of people. Social sciences have proven that a person is a person is a person. Now take all the minds in the world and at least listen to them. At least try to see what you can learn from them. Later, in terms of how it works in a specific culture, I believe there are variations. But let’s start at the macro level. The first thing is to resist intuitive beliefs. It is unbelievable what a full-fledged war people are fighting for their beliefs. I couldn’t just tell them: Guys, you are talking nonsense. I couldn’t tell then to throw away 30 years just like that. I could only say: this contradicts what research from around the world is showing. I was most comfortable when a couple of people were sparring at the table, each saying the opposite, and each coming with their 30 years of experience, and I would tell them: Listen to me for a moment, you each have 30 years of experience, but you’re saying the opposite. Let’s see what the research says. It would turn out that there was something for them to learn.

Badi: Very nice. Roni, this has been a fascinating conversation, as always. We had the great privilege of being with you and following some of your activities. Unfortunately, we’re looking at it with great longing and nostalgia. There hasn’t been an academic forum or academic study in recent years, not since you left the police force. I very much hope that the Israel Police will return to the path that you paved. It is a revolutionary path, by any measure. I hope that, from this interview and the paper that will come out of it, some inspiration will also be provided for policing, for commissioners and police officers around the world, who will hear about your experience and the reforms you’ve led and learn from it. Thank you!