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Global Executive Conversation

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Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the United States

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DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: We're very pleased to have our conversation today with the ambassador to the United States from Poland, Marek Magierowski. Did I pronounce that correctly? OK. And he is – he just came from a meeting with some people at the Pentagon. So we'll hear the latest about that, hopefully.

AMBASSADOR MAREK MAGIEROWSKI: You won't. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And he is, by trade – in training – a journalist. He was an editor, columnist, journalist for some 20 years before he joined the president's – the chancellery, the White House, the main operation of the president of Poland. And subsequent to that he led the press operation for the chancellery. And subsequently –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Quite miserably.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, did a pretty good job. And then you also became the deputy foreign minister. After that, you became ambassador to Israel, served there for three years, and, as of November 23 last year, you became the ambassador here, right?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Exactly.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So let's talk about Poland right now. Poland has done an incredible job of trying to support the Ukrainians. Is that very popular in Poland, to be doing this, or not?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: According to a recent poll which came out just a few days ago, about 70 percent of the Polish population has been somehow involved in this kind of humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians. And I've said this on several occasions, that in our case this is probably the first humanitarian crisis in Europe's history in which the host country does not need to build refugee camps for all those migrants who have crossed the border with Poland since the beginning of hostilities.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you're saying it is reasonably popular, because a lot of people are participating and doing this.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I would be very frugal in using the word "popular" because it's also a burden.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, that's what I wanted to ask you about.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: It's going to cost Poland a lot of money. And you're taking refugees in. Are you expecting these refugees are going to stay forever, or are they going to go back?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: There has been a remarkable outpouring of solidarity and sympathy towards our Ukrainian brethren. Also because we know the Russian or the Soviet mentality, if you will. So we felt obliged to help them. Most of those families who fled Ukraine are now

hosted by Polish families in Polish homes. And that's why I mentioned those refugee camps. There were, by the way, a few congressional delegations coming to Warsaw and to Poland over the last couple of weeks. And many of them were asking their counterparts from the Polish parliament, Polish officials, where are the refugee camps? We would like to visit one. Well, and the answer they always got was: There are none, because we don't need them.

Of course, as I said, this is also – Poland is filling up right now. Two-point-eight million refugees who have already found safe shelter in Poland but, for example, they concentrate in big cities – Warsaw, Wroclaw, Gdansk, Poznan. So we would like – to put it bluntly – we would like to spread them out a little bit. Of course, some of them already emigrated to other countries, like Germany, Sweden, France. Some of them returned to Ukraine.

By the way, there was fertile ground for the absorption of those refugees after the invasion began because before the war we had about 1.5 million Ukrainians living and working in Poland. And they were integrating so smoothly, so impeccably into the Polish society, they used to learn the language in a matter of months, perhaps because these two languages are so similar to each other. They have similar cultural background, historical roots. And that's why, for example, now all those subsequent waves of refugees from Ukraine are also integrating pretty quickly.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK, but of the 2.3 million, or so, that have now come in –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Point-eight.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Point-eight. So do you expect that most of them will stay? Or eventually most of them will go back?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Some of them have already decided to return to Ukraine, mostly to the western part or to Kyiv. But many of them think that staying permanently in Poland – also because many of them hope that this war will end soon. I'm also keeping my fingers crossed for this war to end as quickly as possible. They have families and relatives in Poland already. And that's why, for example, as I said, they concentrate in big cities, because this is where their relatives live too.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I should say my daughter has been volunteering on weekends to go to Poland to work on the Red Cross. And she just got back and she told me there's a lot of American troops over there, and NATO troops. What are they all doing over there? They're just helping the Ukrainian –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: First of all, we need more.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: And that is one of the subjects our defense minister and Secretary of Defense Austin touched on during their conversation just a few minutes ago. Well, we've had American troops for several years now on Polish soil, stationed not permanently, on a rotational

basis. And this is one of the issues we are talking about with our American partners, how to – how to promote this presence of U.S. troops to the higher level.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And do you want to have American troops there longer or you want to have them there shorter?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, we want them to stay permanently in Poland, also in light of the growing aggressiveness of our Russian neighbor. And I think that this conviction that the eastern flank – not only Poland but also all those countries located geographically in this and other parts of Europe, should be strengthened militarily. And this is, of course – this will be absolutely beneficial to our collective security.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, if the American troops were to stay there longer, the theory would be that that provides you greater protection against Russians coming in? Is that the idea?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: This is the idea. Of course, we are a member of NATO. Poland is also a member, and a very active one, in the European Union. We don't fear Russian aggression now. I think Russians are more concerned about our potential reaction to their hypothetical incursion into one of NATO countries. I hope it won't be Poland. But on the other hand, I do believe, after analyzing and trying to read into the mind of President Putin, which is always a risky business, I don't have that much hubris to lay out my own analysis of what he really thinks about the future of his own country and about the future of Europe. But I do believe that Ukraine is not the last item on his menu.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right, so – all right, why do you think Putin is trying to do what he's doing? He wants to take over all of Ukraine and have it be a –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: He dreams of winning the Cold War, but not the new one. Sometimes we are talking about a new Cold War unfolding in front of our eyes in Europe. I think he dreams of winning the old Cold War, which basically ended at the beginning of the '90s. But it's like adding a new twist to a movie or rewriting the script altogether. This is his main ambition.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So how long do you think this war will go on, at this point?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It seems that it will be a protracted conflict. Now the Russians are regrouping and moving their units to the eastern part of Ukraine. The character of this war itself is changing as we speak, because from the very beginning it had been a land war, in spite of the fact that one of the most spectacular events in that war was the sinking of the Movska cruiser. But it has been a land war. And it will be more of a land war right now. Clashes and battles of tanks. It's like, you know, returning to the times of World War II.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So you think that this will go on for quite some time. But you think at some point Putin would like an off ramp so he can say: I won. I got something. What is it you think he now thinks he needs to get to be able to say he can end this? Is there something –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: No matter – no matter how this war ends, and again I'm pretty optimistic and I think that Ukraine will prevail and Russia will be eventually crushed in Ukraine – regardless of the final outcome of this conflict, Putin has to sell it as a victory. And we are approaching now a turning point, a crucial moment, which will be May the 9th, the victory parade on the Red Square in Moscow. And he will feel obliged to sell this military operation in Ukraine as a success, as a military achievement of the Russian Federation. I wonder how he will do it.

Paradoxically, now with the Russians living mostly in an information bubble because they have been, well, essentially cut off from unbiased information and objective media coverage, he can do it. He can sell this defeat in Ukraine – and I – again, hopefully it will be a defeat for the Russian army and for the Russian Federation – as victory.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, right now he's more popular in Russia than he was before the military operation, is that right? At least that's what the polls say.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: We need a pinch of salt trying to analyze all those polls which have been published recently in Russia, because it's very hard to believe that those polls and those surveys are fully credible.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Why do you think the Russians were so ill-prepared to take over Kyiv, for example? They didn't seem to have their military act together.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I don't know how many books on wartime logistics all those Russian commanders have read in their lives. I've read some. I'm not a military expert. But it has been a profound and grave embarrassment for the Russian army, which is a good sign and a bad sign at the same time. Because, you know, the attrition rate, for example, of the combat materiel is extraordinary. So they are losing equipment. They are losing manpower. So the Russian army now is much, much – way weaker than it was at the beginning of the invasion. Which is a very positive development from our viewpoint.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, are there new soldiers coming in from Russia? Or are there people coming in – soldiers – from Syria or Chechnya? Who's doing the fighting now?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: We have not yet any evidence of the presence of those Syrian or – well, mostly Syrian or Libyan fighters coming to Ukraine, some Chechen fighters too. Although many of those video clips you can see on Twitter and on other social media are probably fake because they are – there is that clip with Chechen fighters firing shells against, you know, some signage on the streets of Kharkiv. It's hilarious, of course, but on the other hand, of course, there is a shortage of manpower now on the Russian side. And that's why, for example, I think that Putin will try to mobilize the society and to mobilize, literally, those young lads, those poor conscripts, which will be sent to Ukraine shortly.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Suppose the Russians kind of control the eastern part of Ukraine, the Donbas area, which they've more or less controlled for a while, and they keep Crimea. And he

says, OK, we have the independent Republic, or whatever he's going to call it, of Donbas. We've got Crimea. We'll call it a day. Would that be –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: This is a plausible scenario. As I said, he has to sell this operation as a victory. He has – but, you know, on the other hand, we are still thinking about how to – about all those possible, plausible scenarios after the war. And I believe there will be tremendous pressure on the part of at least some European countries to return to normalcy in our relationship with Russia, both in terms of our trade and political relations with that country. And it will be very perilous in terms of our political standing.

Right now we are in the middle of a very interesting and intriguing discussion about Germany's stance, for example. Germany is – the German government is arguing that firstly, for example, that closing all the loopholes in the – in the sanctions package that we have imposed – I mean, the European Union and also the United States and some other superpowers have imposed on Russia. We have to close all those loopholes. And this is, for example, the Polish government's priority.

We are talking about blocking imports of oil, coal, and gas, and other commodities from Russia. The Polish government announced a few weeks ago that we are going to give up our imports of coal immediately, then imports of gas by the end of the year. But some other countries in Europe are pretty hesitant. And they are – because they are too reliant on imports of Russian raw materials.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So Germany gets, like, 40 percent of its energy from the Russian gas, I guess it is. So what percentage of your energy is dependent on Russian gas and Russian oil?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It's much less. On the other hand –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Where do you get it from?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: – additionally, we were much more prescient, if you will, than other European countries because thought about our energy security in a longer term many years ago. And that's why, for example, we decided many years ago to render Poland entirely independent of imports of Russian gas. We started building and we inaugurated the first LNG terminal on the Polish stretch of the Baltic Coast in 2016.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Your energy comes mostly, though, from where?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: From coal.

[audio break]
MR. RUBENSTEIN: Coal? And is that –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yes, it's 70 percent of our energy needs. So gas doesn't account for a significant amount of our energy needs. But let me just – Polish government, of course. And this is – [end audio break] we have never, and we will never, recognize Russian jurisdiction over

Crimea and Russian jurisdiction over those two breakaway provinces in the east. It's absolutely impossible. The Polish – the current Polish government, and any other Polish government, no matter the political affiliation and political colors, will never recognize Crimea as Russian territory. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, what about the sanctions, though. Would you lift the sanctions? I mean, how much longer after the –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I will give you some very specific conditions, which are not yet official. This is my personal view. But I believe that if we – if we even – if we want to even start thinking about easing up on those restrictions that you have just mentioned, or lifting part of the sanctions, there are some obvious conditions. First of all, Russia has to withdraw all its troops from not only Ukraine proper but also from Crimea and all those territories which were annexed and occupied in 2014. They have to pay war reparations to Ukraine. You can't even imagine the scale of devastation caused by Russian troops in Ukraine. It's hundreds of billions of dollars of material losses that Ukraine has suffered over the last, how many, five weeks. It's hundreds of billions of dollars.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But is it realistic that you can ever get Russia to agree –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: If we don't think it's realistic, we can already surrender to Russia.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So now there's no sympathy that a lot of people –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Another point, excuse me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Yes.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: War crimes. And this is – I know it's a very sensitive issue. And many politicians in the West have been very reticent until recently using the term genocide in – when we look at what is going on in Ukraine, and all those unspeakable, horrendous, abhorrent crimes committed by Russian troops in Lviv, in Kharkiv, in Mariupol, in Bucha. We have seen an overwhelming evidence of war crimes and genocidal tendencies, not only among Russian troops but also in the Russian political elite. It's absolutely unimaginable that the Russian president officially and openly praises the unit which committed those atrocities in Bucha we all saw. And the Russian president praised the soldiers who participated in those atrocities.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Nobody would defend that in the West, certainly. But the issue – the case of war crime trials, they only occur when somebody is out of power and they're no longer running their own government. So as long as Putin is running the government, how can you really have a war crime trial?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It's difficult. On the other hand, Russia, for example, is not party to the ICC, to the International Criminal Court in the Hague. So maybe we would have to establish a new tribunal, an international institution, which would justly try and sentence all those Russian war criminals.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So a famous Washington journalist, Michael Kinsley, once said, a gaffe, a mistake, by a politician is when he says –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I'm familiar with gaffe.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. OK. [Laughter.] So that means that a politician actually said something that is truthful, but he couldn't – wasn't supposed to say that. Some people would say that President Biden had a gaffe when he said we need to get rid of Putin. What is your government's position? Should Putin stay in power after there's an armistice? Or do you really need to get him to go?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Our position is pretty clear. It's up to the Russian people to elect their own political leaders. It's a pity that this great country, with such great culture, has a leader who is an autocrat with racist tendencies. I'm not refraining from using this term. Oppressing not only Ukraine nowadays but also his own people. You know, by the way, Putin, I believe, has accomplished, pretty paradoxically, what we have been struggling to achieve for so many years.

He has strengthened the Ukrainian national identity. He has proven that Russians and Ukrainians are not the same people. He has reinvigorated the European Union. I'm perceived as a Europhile back in Poland, but I never believed that the Russian president would revitalize this organization. He has pushed Sweden and Finland towards NATO. These two countries will join the NATO shortly. So a master strategist, isn't he? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, this is called the law of unintended consequences, right? So look what he's done. Nobody else was able to do that. But let me ask you about a country you were an ambassador before. Israel, which is a democratic country –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I feared that, yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: It's a democratic country most people would say, I think. Not everybody, but most people would say it's a democratic country, and therefore a country that you would think would line up behind Ukraine. But they didn't do so. Why is that?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Firstly, I would like to stress one thing clearly, that for every Polish diplomat accredited to Israel, a three-year stint is like a 30-year tenure in any other country. So if you can – if you can see all those gray hairs in my head, this is Israel. But seriously, I fell in love with the people. I fell in love with the country, with the culture, with the remarkable past which we partially share this past with Israel, as you perfectly know. It's a very complicated – a very complex history. So it was pretty complicated for me, as a Polish diplomat, to, for example, explain all those nuances of our bilateral relationship, but also of our relations with Russia.

I will give you one telling example. There is – every year, there is a so-called veterans day celebrated in Israel. Basically, the Israeli political class commemorates the sacrifice made by the Red Army, which as you know, for example, liberated the Auschwitz concentration – the Auschwitz death camp. And this is the first association that comes to the mind of most Israelis

when I mentioned the Soviet Union or the Red Army. They say, oh, the Red Army liberated not only the Auschwitz concentration camp, but they insinuate that the Russian army liberated Europe from Nazism. And then a discussion begins because, as you know, our perception of the Red Army is a little bit different. [Laughter.]

So among many other areas in which we have our disagreements with Israel, it was one of the – well, it was actually a side dish, right? But it is also a very important topic I had to touch often in countless discussions as one of the interlocutors.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But were you criticized in Israel because people would say that the concentration camps were in Poland? And so, therefore –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Oh, yes, how many hours do we have to talk about that?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So right now, back to Israel, are you surprised that the Israeli government's trying to be an intermediary? And do you think that it's likely to be successful in getting the war to end?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, to put it diplomatically, a bit disappointed. Not surprised, because a phrase I heard on multiple occasions in Israel was, Russia is our neighbor how. Not geographically, but certainly geopolitically. And they meant Russian military presence in the Middle East, mostly in Syria. So they have that deconfliction agreement with Russia, which allows them to carry out air operations in Syria, targeting – attacking Iranian targets in that country. So it's very important for them to maintain a decent relationship with Russia. So it's – on the one hand, it's understandable. But on the other hand, this is where we clash with Israel in terms of our relationship with Russia.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. One of the other former Soviet satellite countries, Hungary, now seems to be fairly steadily in the camp of Russia. Is that a problem for Poland, to have Hungary –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It is. It is, definitely, because Hungary is part of the Visegrád Group[1] which plays a very important role within the European Union. And we have been coordinating our policies also at the European level but, for example, Hungary is a NATO member country too. So this is – this is, again, a little bit disappointing from our perspective?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How do you coordinate policies? Because they might be leaking what you're thinking about doing to the Russians. You ever worry about that?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It's a problem. It is a problem. But I had – a few weeks ago, I had a very – a friendly chat with Gregory Meeks, who's the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House. And it was a meeting of some ambassadors from the eastern flank. And he asked us about what our view was on the intelligence sharing among those countries in

[1] The Visegrád Group (also known as the Visegrád Four, the V4, or the European Quartet) is a cultural and political alliance of four Central and Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. All four states are also members of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Europe and the United States. And I was trying to explain to him that, paradoxically, nowadays if you share intelligence with us, with Poland, with the Czech Republic, with Slovakia, with the Balkans countries, it's safer than sharing intelligence with Germany or with France, because of those – of those business ties which are so strong between Germany, France, and Russia.

I did mention Hungary, of course. And again, I would like to comment on this, because it's very – it is a very ticklish issue also for us. And we'd like to maintain a distant and a good relationship with Hungary, which has always been our partner and ally in a number – in an array of dimensions. So again, it's pretty disappointing. And we will be trying to persuade our Hungarian partners that they are not exactly on the right side of history right now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Is there any air between you and Germany? Or the German government and the Polish government, do you see eye-to-eye on Ukraine?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Probably not. We had that announcement of the German chancellor yesterday. They are, as I said, much more hesitant and much more reluctant, for example, to deliver weaponry to Ukraine. And their relationship with Russia, as you rightly noted, 55 percent of their energy needs are – I mean, gas needs are covered by inputs from Russia. So it's a completely different situation. On the other hand, we do realize and we are acutely aware of Germany's role within the European Union. It is a very important – our most important trading partner, a political giant.

But militarily, I wouldn't use the word "dwarf," but militarily Germany is much weaker than it used to be. And, paradoxically, now a majority of Poles – this is my impression – an overwhelming majority of my fellow countrymen wish Germany spent more on its military than less. We would prefer Germany to have our back, because it's a very important ally and partner in these two organizations.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: If Merkel were the chancellor still of Germany, would it make a difference?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Hard to say. I'm not a soothsayer.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, just guess. Do you think she's –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: [Laughs.] It would be a very wild guess. No, I think this is – this is a comparison frequently used by politicians and pundits. Germany, like America, is like a big aircraft carrier. It's very difficult to change course, regardless of who rules Germany right now – be it the Conservatives, be it the Social Democrats, be it The Greens. Now there are some – there is a rift. And there are some frictions inside the German government because, interestingly, The Greens are much more outspoken and much more vociferous in terms of punishing Russia and tightening this economic noose and strengthening the sanctions regime.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do you have any evidence that China is providing military or economic support to the Russians?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I don't.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do you think they are, we just don't have evidence? Or you don't know?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I have a very deep appreciation for the capabilities of our Polish intelligence, but I don't have much knowledge about –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So today the president of the United States has said we're not sending American military troops – ground troops into Ukraine. Are there Polish ground troops in Ukraine?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: No, there aren't. But Poland – it's no secret that Poland has become the heart for weapons deliveries to Ukraine. And we are very proud of that. And we do believe that, as I have said repeatedly, that Ukraine is now fighting not only for their freedom, and for their independence, and for their sovereignty, they're also fighting for ours. They're also fighting for our values. And of course, we can't engage in a major military confrontation with Russia. We can't technically and legally defend Ukraine because Ukraine is not a NATO country. But we can do our, and we should do our utmost to help Ukrainians defend themselves and defend us.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, Poland is a member of NATO. And under the agreement of NATO if Poland is attacked all members of the NATO would defend Poland. Do you think it's actually true that if Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia were attacked, tiny little countries –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I have no doubts whatsoever about NATO countries' willingness and readiness to defend also the Baltics, not only Poland, all the countries on the eastern flank. I do believe, and I am pretty adamant, as is the Polish government, that Article 5[2] is absolutely sacrosanct.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And let me ask you about Poland as a weapons facilitator. Your weapons are being delivered over from the United States, I guess either to Poland or Romania. And then you help facilitate getting them into Ukraine. How do you get them in there?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I'd like to know that too.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You don't know? I'm assuming you have secret routes or something.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Actually, I prefer not to know many things. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So let me switch for a second and talk about Poland itself. So how many people live in Poland?

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[2] Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (basis of NATO) commits each member state to consider an armed attack against one member state to be an armed attack against them all. Upon such attack, each member state is to assist by taking "such action as [the member state] deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area." Article 5 has been invoked only once in NATO history: by the United States after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Thirty-eight million.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And the religion is predominantly Catholic?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Catholic, yes. It's 93-95 percent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Not all of them – regrettably, not all of them attend church every Sunday.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And the Jewish population was wiped out in World War II, but is there some Jewish population?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Between five to – between 5-and-10,000 people of Jewish descent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Five to ten thousand?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yes, living now in Poland.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So what is the biggest export of Poland?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Apples.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Apples?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What's the biggest import? I'm assuming energy.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, yes, energy.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK, so not long ago the Polish government said, well, we have some MiG jets. Why don't we supply these MiG jets, and the U.S. can make up that with some other planes? Why didn't that work?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: There was some controversy which arose around that particular issue. I will explain this to you in detail. It was Josep Borrell, the high representative of the European Union, who first proposed to deliver those aircraft to Ukraine. I have got the impression that in America there was a perception that those Soviet-made fighter jets – that they looked like those B-52s, the Stratofortresses, which are, you know, mothballed somewhere in the middle of the desert, in Nevada, covered by dust but usable. No, our MiGs, the Soviet-made fighter jets, were upgraded a few years ago. They are pretty modern. And they account for one-third of our fleet of combat aircraft.

This leads me to a very obvious conclusion: We can't rid ourselves of one-third of our air capabilities without proper compensation or backfill. And that's why the Polish government came up with that idea of putting those aircraft at the disposal of NATO, or to be more precise at the disposal of the U.S. government, to transfer them first to the airbase in Ramstein, in Germany. And then if all NATO countries choose unanimously to transfer these airplanes further to Ukraine, well, we'd be fine with that. But the –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What was the objection?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: The American government decided that it was not the brightest idea. And it's still on the table. I mean, it's still a valid proposal, although I – on the other hand, we tried to understand, of course, the American position when they say it would be too escalatory from the point of view of Russia.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The U.S. government has taken the position there should not be a no-fly zone. Do you agree with that? Does the Polish government agree with that?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yes, because as I said a few minutes ago we don't need a military confrontation with Russia. I can only quote Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's secretary-general, who has already said on several occasions that NATO is not at war with Russia. And it won't be. But of course, NATO has also a role in this conflict.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, from time to time when President Putin gets upset, he mentions the word "nuclear." So are you worried –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: My friends back in Poland freak out every time he says nuclear, believe me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I mean, do you worry that he's going to use some kind of tactical nuclear weapon, or you just think it's threatening?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Personally, I think it's bluff. But you never know.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What about other types of weapons of mass destruction – chemical or biological – which may not be as easy to trace?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, we heard Minister Lavrov saying that at this stage Russia is not planning to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. We also heard warnings on the part of the American administration that chemical weapons would be deployed in Ukraine. So far this has not happened. Hopefully, it will not happen during this conflict. But again, both Putin and his closest aides, his generals, are so unpredictable that we have to be prepared for any scenario.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So sometimes people write about nuclear weapons and they say, well, it's just a tactical nuclear weapon, like a tactical nuclear weapon doesn't kill millions of people. So what –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Anyway, it would be – this would mean that the Russians crossed a redline, anyway, no matter the yield. I have already memorized so many fancy terms in military parlance.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What happens if – I think some Russian missiles have gone into Polish territory or Romanian territory? Or not?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: There was that missile attack a few weeks ago, which was just about 10 miles from the Polish border. And people who were – who lived on the other side of the border, they saw their windows in their houses trembling from the blast. So it was, you know, a physical, tangible proof that we are – we are experiencing war just across our border. So it's troubling. It's disturbing, also for Poles who live not only closer to Ukraine on the border, but if I said, well half-jokingly, that my friends in Poland freak out every time they hear Mr. Putin, you know, threatening us with the use of his nuclear arsenal. But it's true that, you know, returning at least mentally to the times of the Cold War, this is a very painful experience for many Poles as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The Russians have said they don't like the U.S. supplying these weapons to the Ukrainians.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Of course, they don't.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But presumably they don't like Poland helping out either. Suppose missiles were to fall on Poland directed from Russia. Would you think at that point you would have to be at war with Russia, and NATO would support you?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: President Biden once said: We are going to defend every inch of NATO territory. So that every inch of NATO territory is mostly in Poland.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So what is the chance, in your view, of Putin being deposed by people saying, hey, look, this is costing us too much money and aggravation, and lives, and it's not worth the effort. Is that –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Quite frankly, I don't believe in a coup in the Kremlin. Because if you – if you have created that – and Putin has been pretty adamant about that. He has created an ambiance of fear and distrust within the walls of the Kremlin. So if you could imagine Mr. Shoigu approaching Mr. Lavrov and saying to him, you know, this guy is insane, we have to topple him? And you can expect Mr. Shoigu, you know, tiptoeing into Putin's office and saying to him: You know, Mr. Lavrov told me that he wants to topple you. What should I do about that?

So the level of distrust in the Kremlin is so tremendous – I have never been there, of course, but I can imagine from what I read and from what I see that it would be very difficult to even envisage such a scenario. Social unrest in Moscow, in St. Petersburg, the Russian society feeling the pinch of sanctions, economic crisis – but of, I mean, epic proportions – because this is

what we would need to even think about this possible scenario of social upheaval which would eventually sweep away the current Russian political elites.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There was a theory that as the body bags came back that Russian mothers would be protesting in the streets, but that doesn't seem to be happening yet. Why do you think not?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Because you can't see those body bags on Russian TV. This is – this is the answer.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And are they sending the body bags back? Because some people say they're taking – they have crematoriums that are mobile, and they're just incinerating these bodies.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: We don't have evidence of that. But again, the Russian society now lives in an information bubble. So they believe that this military operation so far has been successful.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So do you think if there was an armistice or a truce and Putin says, look, I really care about the oligarchs. I mean, their yachts need to go back, and so forth. Is there any way in the world that you could see the Western allies giving back all the things that have been confiscated from all the oligarchs?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: The European Union has committed itself to transferring about half of – half a billion euros to Poland as a kind of assistance and a compensation for what we have done already for the Ukrainian refugees. Five hundred million dollars is roughly the worth of one of those yachts owned by Russian oligarchs and confiscated by French or Italian authorities in recent weeks. So this is the scale of assets the Russian oligarchs close to Putin still possess in the West. And that's why I said about the necessity to close all those loopholes in the sanctions regime. For example, not all Russian banks have been excluded yet from the SWIFT messaging system. So, for example, the ruble has strengthened. And the Moscow Stock Exchange has not suffered sufficiently, as opposed to the expectations of many political leaders in the West.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But your view is that the oligarchs' assets that have been confiscated almost certainly will not be given back? They'll be used for reparations or something like that?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yes. Yes. If this is the decision of the Western political elites, that would be a nice one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, there's Russian currency reserves that are in the West and I think that they've been frozen. Do you think they should be given back, or?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: If it's legally possible, yes, they should.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: They should be given back?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: No, given – no, no, given as – no I misunderstood you. If we are talking about reparations, if we are talking – no. No, absolutely. They are – many of them have been confiscated, many of them have been seized.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Now, let's talk about your background for a moment. How do you get to be ambassador? Let's talk about this. So you were a journalist. Nothing wrong with being –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Once a journalist always a journalist. Once a KGB officer – [laughter] –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. So you spend 20 years as a journalist, and then you went to the dark side. You were in the government. So what prompted you to say, I've had enough of being a journalist?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: You think journalism is on the bright side?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, it's –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Sam, what's your opinion? [Laughs.] Still.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So you think – so why did you get out of journalism?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, to be honest, it was in 2015 when I transitioned to the chancellery of the Polish president. I knew at the time – I sensed what direction journalism was heading, both in Poland and in other European countries, and also in America, because I had been covering also the United States in my previous incarnation. And it was becoming – at the time, it was already becoming tribal and so profoundly affiliated with political camps. And I didn't want to be a journalist in disguise.

So I came to the conclusion that if I wanted to be a politician, so be it. I became a politician, with all the baggage and all the burden that that implies. Because I knew – for example, it was funny, because when I became the spokesperson, the press officer of my president, all of a sudden I was standing in front of my former colleagues, with whom I was on first-name terms. And they knew me, I knew them. And they knew very well when I was manipulating them. There was one caveat. I knew from the very beginning of my new walk of life that I would never lie to them.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you enjoyed getting out of the –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Oh, I did.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Vastly.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, why were you selected to be ambassador to Israel?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I don't know. Someone selected me. But I was deputy foreign minister before that, responsible for, among many other galaxies, for both Americas – North America and Latin America. But also, in a certain period of time, I was also responsible for the Middle East. So I dealt with Israel. So someone quite cleverly, to my detriment, came to the realization that maybe I would be the best candidate, knowing both sides of this equation.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So you didn't go on Ancestry.com to see whether you had any Jewish blood or anything your background, no? You never know –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: No Jewish ancestry at all. But, well, I've always stressed the importance of this particular geopolitical triangle – Warsaw, Washington, and Jerusalem. I should have said Tel Aviv. Warsaw, Washington and –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Where is your embassy?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: In Tel Aviv.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Tel Aviv. Now, you have a facility for languages. You speak how many languages?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It fluctuates.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: It fluctuates?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I'll tell you why. According to people who have much deeper expertise in this field than I do, you are usually capable of speaking between four to five languages simultaneously and at the same level of fluency. Now, for example, I'm forgetting Hebrew at a vertiginous pace, even though I haven't been using this language, I mean, physically and literally for a few months.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So you do English, Polish, what else? French?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It's so embarrassing to me. Yes, French.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So I only can do English, but I was curious how you could do all that. English, French, Polish, Russian?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Spanish. Spanish was the first foreign language I learned.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: German?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Hebrew?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I'm forgetting Hebrew. But still I am –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow. Right, so when you first became ambassador here people weren't paying that much attention to you, I guess, right? I mean, when you came over here as ambassador, you know, in Washington there are a lot of powerful people here, and often ambassadors are not getting all the attention –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: They're not that powerful, yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. So, I mean, was it hard to get a meeting with the president to present your credentials? Or you got that done right away?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I haven't met him yet.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I presented my letters of credence virtually.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, OK.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: And I got a very nice bag of chocolates from President Biden. [Laughter.] No, seriously, it was due to the pandemic, of course, that all those ceremonies were suspended at the White House. But they are now returning to normalcy. So was the first batch of ambassadors who were received a few weeks ago at the White House. And I expect to be in the next one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But now everybody wants to talk to you, right, because you're an important country, more than maybe people thought it was before. So are you now spending all your time meeting with –

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: We are having this window of opportunity, to put it cynically. And I'm trying to – you know, to squeeze it, and to use it as effectively as possible.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. So what is the most common question people ask you about Poland?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Oh, gosh. Well, I've been talking mostly about the refugee crisis for the last couple of weeks. And again, I'd like to – I appreciate all those – it's reciprocal that I hear so many words of appreciation for what we have done for Ukraine and for the Ukrainians over the last couple of weeks.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And do you have a family?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I'm here with my wife, now with my family because my kids are visiting, adult –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So your wife is here?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Yes, my wife is here.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And does she speak five or six languages also?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: She speaks two.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And how many children do you have?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: We have two children. Our son is 26 and our daughter is 23.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Are they in journalism, private equity, something? [Laughter.]

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: God forbid. God forbid.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Journalism or private equity? [Laughter.]

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Dentistry. No, no, it's not. Just joking. My daughter studies film production back in Poland. So you can imagine how thrilled she was when she learned that her dad would become the next Polish representative to the United States. I told her explicitly if you have a million dollars to spend go ahead, you can find someone who would finance your studies here. I'm ready to do this, but it would be – that's our decision.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And your son, what does he do?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: My son, this is a longer story, my son studied health economics in Poland at one of the universities in Warsaw, in English. And he had – he majored in epidemiology, biostatistics, big data. And it was six months before the pandemic broke out. So he was pretty prescient, wasn't he? Jackpot.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But are they in Poland now, your children?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Sorry?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Your children are in Poland?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Now they are here, but they are permanently based in Poland.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And they like living in Washington, or they like it?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: They've been here for a week, so they are, you know, a little bit overwhelmed.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And so today what would you say is the biggest misconception that Americans have about Poland?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I will tell you what the biggest misconception among Israelis is, because this is what I've talked to them about on several occasions. Many of those people who, for example, visited Poland on the so-called – I dislike this term, but for want of another one I'm forced to use it – the Holocaust trips. Because before the pandemic, about nearly 40,000 young people in their teens were visiting Poland. Those were four- or five-day trips. And what they saw in Poland were mostly concentration camps. And then they were returning to Israel with that, you know, mental and psychological burden, with that tremendous trauma.

So for many of them – 40,000 people annually – for many of them, the first and the only association with Poland was a huge graveyard. And then I talked to people in their thirties and forties who returned to Poland for the first time in their adult lives. And they say, you know, we expected to see that huge graveyard. We expected to see a drab, gray, colorless post-communist country in the middle of nowhere. And the only attraction was Poland's cheapness. It's a cheap country for many Israelis. And then – they say, then we land in Warsaw, and we see something different altogether. A modern country, a vibrant one. In many spheres, much more advanced, for example, technologically, than Israel, the start-up nation.

They were absolutely shocked when I was telling them, for example, that during my three-year stint in Israel, I never had the opportunity to pay contactless with my credit card. Meanwhile, in Poland, when you walk into a mall you can hear that constant sound of someone paying with their mobile phones. Beep, beep, beep. In Israel, impossible. You always have to swipe, let alone the checks, which is a common characteristic.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So today would you say the Polish economy is in reasonable shape?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It is in a very good shape, especially when you compare the Polish economy to France's, or Germany's, or Denmark or Sweden's, which are also doing relatively well. But, for instance, during the pandemic – and thanks to some countermeasures that the Polish government undertook – the consequences of the pandemic have not been – they have been painful, but not so dramatic as in other European countries.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What percentage of people in Poland are vaccinated now?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: It's about 60 percent. So it's stalled, as in many other countries. We are not satisfied with this level, with the vaccination rate. I wish more people were vaccinated. But again, we are – we are now exiting the most dramatic phase of the pandemic.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And if somebody wanted to visit Poland, just as a kind of a tourist thing, what would they – what should they see? What would they most importantly visit?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk – historical cities with impressive history, a remarkable past. But also, nature is pretty remarkable. And, for example, the lakes in the

northwestern part of Poland, the Tatra Mountains. It's a big country. So you can travel around Poland and be surprised, you know, at every sight.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So you would expect that this war is going to go on for at least another month or two. But in the end resolution do you expect it to be a peace agreement, an armistice like we have in Korea where there's not really a peace agreement, or what would you expect to be the resolution?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I am looking forward to Ukraine's victory. And I didn't believe that Ukraine would prevail just three weeks ago. Now I do. Not only because I have – I have come to the conclusion that in terms of military tactics and strategy, the Ukrainians are much better than the Russians, which also comes as a surprise to me. But also because of all those weapons deliveries. We have transferred so many arms, so much weaponry to Ukraine. President Zelensky, who I respect so much and appreciate him, and I admired him for what he has done and for the leadership. He's still complaining about our, you know, laxness towards Russia and our lenient attitude. And he's, you know, pushing us so hard. But I believe that if we keep this pace of weapons deliveries to Ukraine, they will be capable of defending themselves much more effectively.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: In hindsight, had we had sanctions that were tougher earlier before the invasion or shipped more weapons over that were more significant weapons before the invasion, do you think it would have made a difference?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Probably. I would like to remind you that after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, our relation – ours – the West's relations, if you will, with Russia returned to business as usual in just a couple of months. If we had upheld those sanctions which were imposed after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 for a longer period of time, maybe the effect would have been more efficacious. So we have to be determined and willing to keep the pressure on Russia, maybe for the next five, maybe for the next 10 years.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But if Zelensky, on behalf of the Ukrainian government, says: Look, keep Crimea. And you can have the Donbas, I don't really care about that so much.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: He will never say that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: He will never say that?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, I'm not speaking on behalf of him because I can't. But he has already – he has already made the point on several occasions, and I don't think he will ever say that. Because also internally, domestically, it will be very toxic and suicidal for him, as the Ukrainian leader.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So but any agreement that he agrees to is what you think the Western allies would agree to?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, it's up to him, of course. We can't – we can't push him towards a peace accord with Russia. But on the other hand, of course, we are – we are also – I will tell you another thing which is pretty important. And sometimes this issue is overshadowed by the – by the military issues. Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Ukraine has already applied for membership. And I believe that if Ukraine joins the European Union, this will be the most important achievement and a crucial step in Ukraine's integration with the West. So if they can become EU members, even during the war with Russia, but then that would be a gamechanger for Ukraine and for Europe as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But do you think if the Western allies had said a long time ago to Ukraine, you're not going to be a member of NATO, it's just not realistic, that would have been more helpful in keeping Putin from wanting to go forward?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Many Western politicians said this in the past, that Ukraine would never become – for example, the Bucharest summit in 2008. We all remember that Ukraine and Georgia were promised membership. Then some Western countries opposed – objected to that very idea. But I believe – I would not rule out Ukraine becoming a NATO member one day. But, again, it's up to the Ukrainian society. It's up to the Ukrainian political leaders to make that choice. And again, Russia has no veto power over what other countries also in its immediate neighborhood, which alliances they join, which countries they want to trade with, and what international organizations they want to be part of.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So in your current position, do you ever deal with members of Congress?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Well, many of them.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what is your impression of them?

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: There is a bipartisan consensus on what we should do and what pressure we should exert on Russia. They see and they perceive the eastern flank and the eastern part of Europe as absolutely vital, in terms – also in terms of America's security interests and security concerns, which is a good sign, of course. We are working on it to persuade even more American lawmakers and opinionmakers of the real significance and of the importance of not only Poland, but also of other countries in the region.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, I want to thank you for all the information you've given us, and thank you for giving us this time.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: I wish I could give you more information, especially after that meeting with our defense ministers.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, you want to keep your job, so I know you can't do everything. But let me give you a little gift from the Club, if I could. There it is.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Oh.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: It's a little historic map of the District of Columbia for you.

AMB. MAGIEROWSKI: Thank you. Thank you so much.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Thank you. [Applause]

His Excellency Marek Magierowski
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the United States

Ambassador Magierowski was appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the United States on November 23, 2021. He previously served as Ambassador to the State of Israel from 2018 to 2021. He began his career in public service in 2015, serving the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland as an expert on public diplomacy, and was subsequently appointed Head of the Press Office of the Chancellery of the President. He served as Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2017 to 2018.

A graduate from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan with a degree in Hispanic Studies, Ambassador Magierowski previously worked as a reporter, editor, and columnist for over 20 years.