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I will try to answer the question you addressed, i.e. how you understand power relations in the world today. In my view, there are two main trends in the international system. One is the rise of the Sino American competition in the world, which is certainly going to be the dominant feature of the international system in this century and there is no doubt about that. In comparison to the Cold War, there is a difference which is that the competition between the United States and China is much wider. Indeed, it includes an economic and technological component that did not exist during the Cold War, so in a sense the challenges of the Sino-American rivalry or competition are much wider. It is not going to be like the Cold War because at the same time, in the international system, you have a second dynamic taking place that is created by the rise of a multipolar world. In other words, what characterizes the international system today which makes it quite complex and unstable, is the articulation between this bipolar structure and a multipolar structure. We have a combination of both in the international system, so when we start thinking about it, we have to keep both dynamics in mind.

The important question is to understand how international actors are reacting to those main dynamics. In my view, this new organization of the international system is creating three kinds of actors that I call the followers, the bystanders, and the hedgers, and I would like to develop those. The followers are those who decided for national reasons to take a side in the Sino-American competition, and they think they will increase their national leverage by being part of that competition. What we saw is Australia is a perfect illustration of this in the sense that three years ago the Australian Prime Minister said that they would not take sides between the United States and China, and now they have decided to align with the United States. That is a perfectly respectable choice, and my point here is not to say if it is good or bad, I am just trying to analyze how the international system works. However, the decision taken by the Australians has another implication. It means that China's influence is resented in the world negatively by an increasing number of countries and not only in the West, as our Chinese friends think, but in many other parts of the world. I think that AUKUS sends out a mixed message and in my view the Chinese should take this into account. Obviously, there is a source of polarization around this conflict. On the Chinese side you could, for example, argue that Pakistan has decided to take its side with China and the Pakistanis used to say that China is an all-weather ally.

You have countries that are clearly going to take sides but then you have a second category of countries that are bystanders. They are waiting, looking and in many cases, they do not feel concerned by the competition between the United States and China. Many countries in Africa, even the Middle East or Latin America are looking at the rise of this competition but are not

necessarily concerned. They are bystanders who do not take sides, have good relations with both countries and think that they can increase their leverage and defend their national interests without taking sides. For the moment that is the majority of countries.

In my view, the third category of countries is extremely important and that is what I call the hedgers. The hedgers, from the verb "to hedge", concern significant countries that want to increase their leverage in the international system. They understand that this competition is going to be crucial and want to play on it to increase their leverage. I will give you three totally different examples: Russia, Turkey, and India. In the case of Russia, it obviously understood that it will not become a big power again, but they want to increase their leverage in the international system considerably against the West, Europe, and the United States, by building an informal, not a formal alliance, with China to increase their leverage. They think that this competition between the United States and China will benefit Russia one way or another and there are plenty of examples in this regard. The Indians, particularly after what happened in Afghanistan, of course, are keen to increase their independence and it is not in their parameters to become followers of the United States. However, they are certainly going within the Quad, for example, to increase their strategic cooperation with the United States to balance China, their main rival in the international system. Turkey is very different from the previous two and of course, it is not concerned by the Sino-American rift as such, but they understand that there is a slight weakening of the position of the United States in the world and they want to take advantage of this to increase their leverage vis-à-vis the United States in, for example, having a purely interested relationship with Russia. Of course, Russia understands that they have to accept many things from the Turks if they want them to be more independent from the United States.

Where does Europe stand in all this? Europe will not seat on the fence between the US and China. Our interests and values are much more closer to the US. No doubt about it. At the same time we may have differences of approach and priorities. Hedging means then for Europe being an active player. Having said that, Europe has two liabilities. First Europe is not a state and second, Europe was not historically constructed to deal with power politics. We have structurally to face those two main constraints, not being a state so that we have to define common interests and second, the driving force behind the European Union was not power politics. I used to say that Europe was historically built against power politics, so it is a sea change. However, we cannot afford to stay a soft power because all instruments of soft power are now weaponized. I will finish with this, we have those three main actors, the United States, Russia, and China, among others of course. Vis-à-vis the United States nobody in Europe seriously debates the fact that NATO is the backbone of our security, the debate is about whether NATO is the exclusive instrument for our security. That is the first question. The additional question concerns the nature of the relationships within NATO. Obviously, there are discussions on those two questions, but I think that there is dissatisfaction on those two points and there are areas where Europeans obviously have an interest that NATO will not be involved in, and Sahel, which you mentioned, is a good illustration of this.

We therefore need to have a common position and a common European involvement in this part of the world because NATO is not going to be the answer to all our security problems. I think that the Americans understand this quite seriously and that was mentioned in the communique between Biden and Macron. Second, there is a kind of dissatisfaction in the



nature of the dialogue between the United States and Europe within NATO and obviously this view is not shared by all European member states. I think the HRVP will develop this point in his dialogue with Thierry, but the point is that first of all you have NATO members which are not part of the European Union, and this is a problem. When we talk about constructing a European pillar in Europe within NATO, we have non-EU countries which are part of the debate in NATO. By construction, NATO cannot be the exclusive place for our strategic dialogue with the United States and actually the United States has accepted that. Following the visit of President Biden to Brussels, the United States has accepted the idea of a strategic dialogue between the EU and the United States. It is not in opposition to NATO, it is just that if we want a European pillar within NATO, we need to construct it and to do that we need a concentration and dialogue among Europeans. Therefore, there is no contradiction unless we consider the status quo is perfect.

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Thank you very much. It still raises the question with regard to the Indo-Pacific, whether Europe will be – to use your words – a hedging or a following power.