Defense 2020

“The Overseas Basing Debate, Part 1”

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Kathleen Hicks: Hi, I’m Kathleen Hicks, senior vice president and director of the international security program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. And this is Defense 2020 a CSIS podcast examining critical defense issues in the United States’ 2020 election cycle. We bring in defense experts from across the political spectrum to survey the debates over the U.S. military strategy, missions and funding. This podcast is made possible by contributions from BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and the Thales Group.

Kathleen Hicks: In this episode of Defense 2020 I’ll be speaking with three experts about U.S overseas military basing. Susanna Blume, senior fellow and director of the defense program at the Center for New American Security, Zack Cooper, research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and Dave Ochmanek senior international and defense researcher at the RAND Corporation. In our last Defense 2020 podcast, we dove deep into the conversations around Middle East posture and U.S defense policy in that region. And today we’re going to talk a lot more about what’s happening in Asia and Europe and how to think about the U.S. forces that we have forward. There is a lot of discussion that has occurred around the costs of U.S. military forces for the number of forces we have forward. So just to baseline this conversation before we get too deep into it, the United States currently has about 54,000 troops in Japan, about 32,000 in Germany and about another 28,500 in South Korea.

Kathleen Hicks: We have rotating through Eastern Europe another sizable number, around 4,500 for example in Poland. And again, we have other forces throughout the world, but those are the major concentrations and they seem to take a lot of the discussion around what we get for our forces overseas. So I thought I’d start there on the strategic considerations of why do we have U.S. forces overseas and what do they do for us and why don’t I start with Susanna?

Susanna Blume: Sure. I think the most important aspect of having forces overseas is so that there are U.S. forces in place so that we can fight tonight, as they say, in the Department of Defense. Right? You know, we are a long way from the world’s crisis spots, and if you’re not present in the neighborhood, you’re not going to get there in time.

Kathleen Hicks: Zack, what’s your thought, particularly from the Asia angle about having U.S. forces forward?

Zack Cooper: I think that the critical thing that we often forget in this discussion is we have forces present in Asia, not to protect the Asians themselves, but mostly for our own American interest, right? The forces are there because we think it’s important to have Asia look a certain way and we can talk about what the parameters of our interests are in Asia, but I think sometimes in the basing discussion, especially today, it seems to be that people are assuming that forces are in Japan or Korea simply to protect Japan and Korea. That's not the only reason they're there.
Dave Ochmanek: Right, we have forces the world because we have interests around the world and Susanne is right to focus on the fight tonight. We're there to deter aggression and make sure it doesn't happen or defeat it if it does happen. But it's also easy to overlook all the important things that our forces overseas do for us day to day. We are watching what's going on in every important part of the world with airborne intelligence collectors. We have this in-route based network to support movement of U.S. forces anywhere they're needed, whether that's a humanitarian operation. Think of the response to 9/11. On September 20th President Bush gave an ultimatum to the Taliban to hand over Bin Laden. They refused. 16 days later we had troops on the ground in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban. We had bombs falling on the Taliban. No other nation on earth could have done that and the worldwide network of bases we had in Europe and the Middle East and Asia enabled us to bring that combat power to bear that quickly. It's really important.

Kathleen Hicks: So I want to come back a little bit to Zack's point about the strategic level interests between the United States and its allies. What do allies, particularly the ones that you talked to, Zack in Asia, but wherever you want to mention, what do they think about the role of U.S. forces and the importance of them to their regions?

Zack Cooper: Well, I think for a lot of countries it's an important stabilizing presence. For some countries it's a clear deterrent threat against a specific adversary. Right? So if you're talking about U.S. forces in Korea, South Koreans see that as a capability that protects them against the North Korean aggression. I think there are other countries like Japan, which see it a little bit more broadly. Yes, U.S forces are in Japan to help deter Chinese activities that the Japanese are worried about. But I think they're also in Japan for much broader purposes. Right? So it's all of these alliances.

Kathleen Hicks: So, such as?

Zack Cooper: Well, you know, U.S. forces in Japan are the primary forces we have in the region, air and naval forces.

Kathleen Hicks: Back to Susanna's point about being able to execute our own designs.

Zack Cooper: Exactly, and so I think part of what's important here is that our forces are postured very differently throughout the world. And even if you look at Japan and Korea, which might seem to be similar, most of our forces on Korea are focused on the Korean peninsula and a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. And our forces in Japan are really Indo-Pacific focused forces. So when we talk about these alliances and our forces, we have to be very specific about who we're talking about and what their mission is.

Kathleen Hicks: Susanna, one of the issues that comes up a lot of times, or sometimes with allies and partners, is they pay a price, if you will, for U.S. presence overseas. What are some of the ways you've seen that play out in your work at DOD
[Department of Defense] regarding domestically, politically difficult aspects or regionally difficult aspects or costing other issues that arise around the West’s forced presence in their country?

Susanna Blume: Yeah, so I think there are a couple of different ways to look at the answer to that question. I think Zack’s point is really critical that U.S. forces that we have overseas are generally not primarily for the benefit of the host country. They’re primarily for the benefit of the United States. And so when you’re thinking about a cost benefit analysis, you need to keep that very much in mind. The other thing to think about is generally, you know, regardless of where a certain unit is in the world, it’s in the force and the expensive part is having the force structure in the first instance. And when you start talking about whether it’s based in the United States or overseas, you’re talking about incremental costs at the margins.

Susanna Blume: It’s not the main cost driver when you’re thinking about those things. It’s a point that’s often lost. I just had a Twitter exchange with Nick Kristoff about this last week. And how much are these deployments to the Middle East costing us? It’s like, “Well, there’s certainly an opportunity cost in terms of readiness.” There, you know, there are lots of different costs in that sense, but the dollars cost is not huge.

Kathleen Hicks: But I’m thinking though also of concerns, for example, the United States has had in Japan in Okinawa over the behavior of actions of U.S. service members over time that have created tensions there. That’s one example. Or create tensions between the Okinawans and the [Japanese] central government. I’m thinking about Korea where, you know, the desire of the U.S. to be able to be flexible about operating off of the Korean peninsula for other reasons than North Korean deterrence can be complicated for the South Koreans specifically with regard to China. Or something like in Europe where there is some concern in European publics about how the U.S. might want to use its forces that are based in their countries to do things that they may not agree with.

Susanna Blume: So the thing that all of those examples that you just mentioned have in common is that, you know, for us as Americans it feels very normal to have military forces overseas, but it's actually a very big deal for a country to decide to host a foreign military on its soil, either temporarily or in very, very long-term - decades and decades in a lot of cases. It’s a sovereignty calculation for them, right? Anytime you invite a foreign military into your country, you’re giving up some incremental bit of sovereignty. There’s no way to measure it or quantify it or calculate it, but it’s very much part of the consideration there. And so that sovereignty bucket of issues speaks very much to, you know, the Europeans having concerns about the Americans launching certain types of missions from their countries. You know, the case in Japan, you mentioned tensions in Okinawa. You know, Okinawa is a tiny little island in Japan, but it hosts roughly half of the U.S. service members that are in the country.
Susanna Blume: And they feel that, that's sort of a disproportionate burden. It's a very densely populated area, and so there's friction between the military presence, which is very loud sometimes. You know, primary purpose of fighter aircraft is converting jet fuel into noise someone once told me. You know, and every instance, every host nation, every community really is different. And the concerns that they have and the negotiations that the U.S. government has to go through in order to make sure that there is a positive relationship between the U.S. forces and the host community.

Kathleen Hicks: So Dave, given that the U.S. has generally approached, for example, the Middle East a little differently because of the view that maybe it's we should calibrate our approach in the Middle East with force presence a little more carefully than we do. Can you give us a sense of why that has been the view?

Dave Ochmanek: Well, Al-Qaeda made no bones about the fact that one of their primary issues with the Saudi government was their willingness to allow infidels from our armed forces to be on their territory. They found it a sort of a confession of weakness, if you will. So we have had to be sensitive to that and calibrate the presence accordingly. The host governments have made the calculation that provided we keep our profile low and so forth and conform to their desires about restrictions on our activities, in general it is in their interest as well as ours to host a limited footprint of U.S. forces. And we have done that in most of the Gulf countries over time.

Kathleen Hicks: So let me stay with you to just start walking us through some of these operational issues that you all have already surfaced. And let's just start in Asia. As you look at the challenge presented by North Korea, but primarily by China over the long-term and you think about the way the U.S. is postured in all its dimensions, the activities it's undertaking, the types of capabilities it has both forward and outside the region and its relationships with the countries of the region. Where do you think we're doing well and where do we need some adjustments to have that operational capability?

Dave Ochmanek: Right. So vis-a-vis China, we are not doing well. The overall balance of military power between ourselves and China is eroding. And part of that is about our posture in the region. We inherited from the post-Cold War period this sense that we can rapidly deploy combat power to parts of the world where it's needed once a crisis breaks out. That's a model that worked very well in Afghanistan, as I mentioned, it worked fine against Iraq, it worked fine against Serbia. It will not work against major power adversaries. The Chinese and the Russians can put too much combat power too quickly onto the peripheries of their country and we have to have more combat power readily available, by which I mean within hours and days, not weeks, in order to credibly deter that. So the posture we have in the Western Pacific vis-a-vis China is simply inadequate to that task and it's going to need a lot of attention.

Kathleen Hicks: So Zack, following up on that, love your views but also in the survivability issues, which is a big concern particularly in the Asia-Pacific with regard to
Chinese anti-access/area denial capabilities and how we do what Dave is saying, but ensure our forces and capabilities are survivable.

Zack Cooper: Well, I think one of the real challenges is that as Dave is saying, the most efficient way to project power in large numbers at long distances is to do it through large bases, which is what we’ve relied on in the Pacific, right? Huge bases in Korea, and Okinawa, and Guam, in mainland Japan and we’ve become frankly, I think a little lazy over decades in relying on those bases and assuming that we are going to be able to continue to do that long into the future. And the reality is that with China’s ability to target those bases with ballistic and cruise missiles and follow on forces after they potentially take out at least some of the defenses of those bases, it’s very unlikely that we’re going to be able to continue operating that way in the future. And furthermore, our surface fleet is going to be at significant risk.

Zack Cooper: So we’re going to have to think about operating fundamentally differently. And it’s a problem not just of how we project power, but whether we’re going to rely on that type of power projection for our deterrence missions. And if we’re not, how we are going to maintain a presence both to reassure our allies and partners that we’re going to be there. But also to think about not just the high end scenarios where we’re actually in a shooting war, but also some of the low end, gray zone scenarios where we haven’t done so well in the past. And if we’re talking about relying more say on missile forces, those are going to be even more difficult to posture for gray zone scenarios. So we have a lot of really big challenges ahead of us in the Asia-Pacific.

Kathleen Hicks: Susanna solve that for us.

Susanna Blume: Would that I could. I think that the answer is going to lie in some kind of mix, a mix of many different things, a mix of capabilities that do have to be kind of close to the center of the conflict, capabilities that don’t necessarily. I think it’s also kind of a mix of defensive capabilities and distribution, right? So of course it’s much more efficient in peacetime to operate from these massive hubs. But presenting more targets to the adversary is a good thing actually in many cases. And so you need to figure out how to distribute those logistics across a much larger number of I would say bases, but really what I could mean is dirt strips, right? And everything in between.

Kathleen Hicks: I mean what you’re describing accords with what the Marine Corps Commandant has come out with in terms of his guidance, which is among other things for more dispersal, thinking hard about the way in which we size and shape our presence to take into account the competition elements. Dave, other things that occur to you that are important operationally, particularly by the way, I’d love for you to comment on the concept side of this, which we haven’t really talked about. How do we come up with a theory of victory given all these constraints we’re talking about.

Dave Ochmanek: Yeah, so Zack and Susanne are exactly right. The old playbook where you build big hubs and you put forces there in peace time to make an obvious
an overt deterrent is not going to work. We think about projecting power, but if you base your forces that way, what you're projecting is vulnerability. You're inviting the enemy to come and take you out, so we got to get very creative about what that inside force for generating combat power looks like and it's going to have to be much more mobile, much harder to target, much less dependent on fixed infrastructure than the old way of doing things. And this is where we get to new operational concepts.

Dave Ochmanek: The Air Force is very interested in finding ways to generate air power without dependence on runways and they're looking at mobile launchers, mobile recovery systems, mobile fuel that can allow them to send unmanned vehicles into the battle of space in large numbers, overwhelm a defense, create a targeting grid, engage the enemy, and then come back and recycle. And the NDS sort of points at this-

Kathleen Hicks: National Defense Strategy [NDS].

Dave Ochmanek: Yes, with its emphasis on posturing to blunt aggression by adversaries at the point of contact. That's the challenge I think.

Kathleen Hicks: What's the role then, Zack, for those allies and partners who live in the region, that is the combat zone, if you will. How do we envision them contributing in a way that advances this kind of concept?

Zack Cooper: I don't think we know and the allies certainly don't know. So as we've been having these discussions in the United States through the National Defense Strategy and a lot of work that the three of you have done, we just have not engaged the allies in the way that I think we should. The clearer case is Japan, which has some big decisions to make about the direction that its forces go. For example, they've just procured two, what are basically small aircraft carriers where they could use to operate F-35B. Is that the right way to spend money for them or would we rather them have a larger number of anti-ship cruise missiles? I'm definitely in favor of the latter rather than the former. I think we need to be having very specific discussions with them on these kinds of questions.

Zack Cooper: But one thing that we have not traditionally done well with our Asian allies and partners is work on these long-term development questions. What is our force going to look like? And then what do we need their forces to look like? I think we've done a lot better in Europe where we actually have structures that are meant to do that, but in Asia it's been a much more serious struggle.

Kathleen Hicks: Yeah, and I'm sure there's also a Five Eye's circle of trust, if you will, that captures the Australians in it but wouldn't capture Japan and Korea, the information sharing pieces can be very hard.

Zack Cooper: One reality is that we are a status quo power and so we don't need to rely so much on projecting power and necessarily into the zones that China is most
likely to be able to control right off of its coast. The question for us is, can we prevent China in particular from say taking Taiwan or taking the Senkakus? And that is a very different question than the one that we’ve gotten used to answering, right? It’s a much more minimalist form of defense and there are multiple ways to do that and I think one question that some of our allies are struggling with is, do we want them postured to project power and control territory or to deny aerospace and maritime areas to a potential opponent? I think one question for the US defense establishment is, what’s our own answer to that and then how does that mix with what our allies are going to be capable of doing themselves?

Kathleen Hicks: So Susanna, let’s go to Europe. The challenge set presented by Russia isn’t exactly like the challenge set presented by China, there’s obviously a much larger land component, among other issues that is less of the centrality of the issue. And in Asia there’s no defense analysts worth their salt who has ground invasion plans, if you will, for China but the defense of territory in Europe necessarily involves the ground. How do we think about this counter A2/AD [anti-access/area-denial] if that’s even the right way to think of it. Dealing with this anti-access/area denial challenge that the Russians are putting forward in that region and how it affects our posture.

Susanna Blume: Yeah, so I think, in truth the kind of defense establishment at large is behind on Russia as compared to China. People in the Department [of Defense] and outside the Department [of Defense] have been thinking a lot longer about the China challenge than they have about the Russian challenge, to the extent that we have ideas about how to cope with this, they’re more nascent, less tested, less gamed. But one thing is clear in that, similar to the situation we see with China vis-a-vis a potential Taiwan Strait kind of scenario, is that the theory of victory for red, China or Russia is to create a fait accompli, right? To show up somewhere, be there, occupy territory, hold ground before the United States and our network of allies can get to the scene and do something about it, right? It’s much, much harder to eject Russia from somewhere than it would be to stop them from getting there in the first place. However, to stop them from getting there in the first place, you need a lot of forces in the neighborhood that can respond very, very quickly. And we don’t have that right now in Europe.

Susanna Blume: Whereas in the aftermath of the Cold War, we drew down tremendously. And even in the early 2000s we’re continuing to kind of debate and talk about bringing force levels in Europe down even further. I think the opposite conversation is happening right now, that we need more there, particularly ground forces, pre-positioned equipment and things of that nature.

Kathleen Hicks: So Dave, you’ve actually spent a lot of time at RAND focused on this exact issue set. What are the things we really ought to be doing?

Dave Ochmanek: So our gaming points consistently to a number of capabilities, none of which are exotic, none of which are terribly expensive that really could move the needle in terms of the military balance on the Eastern flank of the [NATO]
Alliance. We believe you need a core force of three heavy armored brigade combat teams present on the ground in the Baltics or in Poland, 24/7, 365. Not in Ft. Hood, not in warehouses in Belgium, right up where they're needed. You need an Army fires brigade... Think about what MLRS [Multiple Launch Rocket System] in Poland could do to Kaliningrad. I want the Russians lying awake at night understanding that they're within range.

Kathleen Hicks: MLRS being an artillery-

Dave Ochmanek: Rocket artillery system.

Kathleen Hicks: ... system, yeah.

Dave Ochmanek: We’ve had it since the 1980s it’s terrific, it’s a great way to kill things. Anti-armor munitions, our Air Force and our Army had in the late 1980s precision-guided area weapons that were designed to kill tanks. We lost interest in that. After the Gulf War we haven't bought any in decades. Let's do it, put them back... cruise missile defense, we know how to shoot down cruise missiles. Right now, we’re again, projecting vulnerability to bases well within range of Russian cruise missiles. So putting that kind of thing in place could really make a difference in terms of the deterrent calculus as Moscow views it.

Kathleen Hicks: How much of that is already in the program of record, what you just described?

Dave Ochmanek: Virtually none of it, as far as I know.

Kathleen Hicks: Well that's not good, Dave.

Dave Ochmanek: It's not good, but it's fixable.

Kathleen Hicks: Yeah, and as you said, probably not that costly. Have you all costed that out?

Dave Ochmanek: Yes.

Kathleen Hicks: And any sense of what that is.

Dave Ochmanek: So as Susanna said, assuming the force structure exists, which in most cases it does, we’re talking about enablers now, not creating new forces, not buying whole new platforms. So it’s tens of billions over the fit, if not hundreds of billions. And leadership can find a way to make that happen if they're determined to do so.

Dave Ochmanek: And of course our allies have a lot of potential to contribute to that as well, and they need to pony up, for both political and operational reasons.

Kathleen Hicks: We're going to have a separate episode on the nuclear elements of U.S. defense policy, but you can't really have a posture conversation without
bringing into it the idea of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent, and the role that it plays. I mean that's the idea at least, right, the role that it plays in constraining and deterring adversaries, and in reassuring allies.

Kathleen Hicks: Maybe Zack, I'll just start with you. How important is that element of our posture to the allies?

Zack Cooper: I think it really depends on the ally. I mean during the Cold War we got very used to nuclear sharing arrangements with some allies. I think that's a discussion that Americans may not want to have, but I think we may get forced into it in Asia, right?

Zack Cooper: We are probably going to be living in a world where the United States has nuclear weapons, as does China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Russia. And where most US friends in the region do not. And I think there are real questions about whether that is a sustainable situation, right? There are real senior experts in Korea and Japan who are openly talking about whether those countries need to pursue nuclear weapons. I think we are going to have to posture our forces, not just to deter the Chinese of course, deter the North Koreans, but to get back to reassuring our allies that in fact we're going to be there in a crisis.

Zack Cooper: And there are some things that concern them. For example, if you look at the Japanese several years ago we got rid of the Tomahawk land-attack missile, the nuclear version, which was a sign to the Japanese that we weren't that worried about needing to have nuclear deterrent presence that was there in the Japanese home islands.

Zack Cooper: And I think now there are lot of Japanese that wish we had that kind of capability. So I think there's some difficult discussions that are upcoming about our nuclear posture. And in Japan and Korea in particular, these are tough discussions for political reasons in those countries, right? In South Korea, because they are facing a North Korea which not only has nuclear weapons, but which they're trying to convince to give up nuclear weapons, and in Japan for historical reasons. So these are really, really tricky issues in Asia.

Kathleen Hicks: How about in Europe, Dave, how much have you all looked at the conventional nuclear linkup?

Dave Ochmanek: Not a lot when the conventional balance is as out of whack as it is.

Kathleen Hicks: Meaning favoring Russia?

Dave Ochmanek: Yes. Red doesn’t need to use nuclear weapons to achieve its objectives. And frankly I think the time has passed when an American President can credibly threaten to use nuclear weapons first in defense of portions of Article Five territory that most Americans cannot find on a map. Not to put too fine a point on it.
Dave Ochmanek: And so we're overwhelmingly focused on shoring up that conventional balance so it doesn't get to that sort of question.

Kathleen Hicks: So this conversation so far on the operational issues, both in Europe and in Asia, and then limited extent that we talked about Middle East, there's a lot of nuance in what all three of you are talking about. And yet the Department [of Defense], as it is want to do, has over time tended to be caricature-ish in its approach in how it talks about the issues of forces overseas.

Kathleen Hicks: And so we've heard eras of time in which the dichotomy of art was steady-state versus surge forces. And then when we were in a state of sort of nonstop 17 years of war, it sort of has shifted to, well maybe what we're talking about is posture versus presence. And now that we're in this post National Defense Strategy description of competition, they are folks inside the Department [of Defense] tearing themselves apart about whether it's competition or conflict.

Kathleen Hicks: And Susanna, I'd love to get your take on, are there pieces of these dichotomies that are helpful? Is it overall harmful for how we think about the way ahead?

Susanna Blume: I mean I think that the very fact that people keep trying to put kind of posture/present/whatever it is in different buckets means that it's something that we need to do in order to understand the why behind why a certain bit of force structure is where it is, right?

Susanna Blume: A similar thing happened when the European Reassurance Initiative morphed into the European Deterrence Initiative. And I think that that's a distinction that's kind of similar to some of the things that you just described, right? Is it, do we have a unit somewhere that's like not necessarily interesting from an operational or a combat-credible perspective, but is there in order to build a relationship with a certain ally or a partner, or reassure an ally or partner that the United States cares about what happens to them?

Susanna Blume: You know? Whereas there are other kind of types of posture or presence that are very much about the ability to respond immediately in the event of a crisis. And I do think that there is a helpful distinction to be made there when it comes to the Department's own understanding of why it is where it is, and what is really important, and what is less important.

Susanna Blume: You know, particularly if we are facing another fiscal contraction and start having to make some of those choices again, we need to understand why things are where they are. Whether the current lexicon is appropriate or useful is a separate question, and I think maybe not.

Zack Cooper: Just as Susanna is saying, there's a clear trade-off between visibility and vulnerability of forces. And in the past we've been very biased towards
having visible forces for good reason. We weren’t that worried about being attacked. We felt like we had a strong ability to deter those attacks.

Zack Cooper: And now we are increasingly worried about the fact that our visible forces can be hit, especially by major power adversaries. And so we are trying to move away from visible forces and from vulnerable forces in some cases. I think what we’re going to see over time is that some of our most visible forces, which we’ve become reliant on both for presence and for major war fighting, are going to be bifurcated. And we’re actually going to do a lot more presence operations with say the surface fleet, and a lot more of the fighting, for example, on the maritime area, under sea.

Zack Cooper: And so we’re going to have a really difficult time figuring out what is it that actually reassures an ally? So in Asia, if you’re worried that your surface fleet can get hit, but they’re the only thing that your friends can actually see when they pull into port, do you want to send a submarine, or do you want to send a DDG [guided-missile destroyer] when there’s a crisis, right? One is going to have most of the combat power that you’re actually going to bring to bear, but the other is going to be visible both to your adversary and to your allies. And that’s something we just haven’t really worked through I think in recent times, at least.

Susanna Blume: I think absolutely in some part, at least that’s what it’s about. I think the tricky thing is that the relationship between readiness and presence is complicated. There are some... Or even readiness and posture, it’s complicated.

Susanna Blume: I think for example, there is excellent ground forces training available in Europe. If you send a unit to Europe, sometimes that unit’s readiness metrics can actually go up, right? Because they have access to this kind of high-end combined arms training. On the other hand, because of airspace restrictions, limitations in Asia, if you send a fighter squadron to Asia, it’s readiness is going to go down over the duration of that deployment, right?

Susanna Blume: And so it really depends on the kind of unit and where it’s going whether a stint overseas is good for its readiness, or bad for its readiness. There’s one example that I point to a lot, and that is if we look back at the USS McCain, and USS Fitzgerald ship collisions. Obviously the underlying factors behind those two terrible tragedies were myriad and complicated and interlocking. But one thing that I see when I look at those two incidents is a Navy that had burned through all of its readiness in the steady state or whatever we’re calling it peacetime, whatever you want to call it, a kind of presence-type missions, and had nothing left in the tank when asked to surge just a little bit in response to provocative activity from North Korea.

Susanna Blume: And the results, as I say, were absolutely tragic. And so I think the Department [of Defense] absolutely has to get a better grip on what those trade-offs are in order to make better decisions about the way that we position our forces around the world.
Kathleen Hicks: And this has been a continuing challenge. So for instance, in the fall of 2019 you had all these coast carriers in dry dock. So there is something going on here. It’s hard to disentangle what is use, overuse, what is management of forces. So yeah, this is a big problem.

Kathleen Hicks: Susanna, Zack and Dave, thanks so much for joining me for today’s episode. And we’ll continue our discussion next time around.

Susanna Blume: Thanks Kath.

Zack Cooper: Thanks Kath.

Dave Ochmanek: Thank you

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