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Blumenthal to Defense Department: What Are You Doing To Support Sailors On The USS Abraham Lincoln?

The aircraft carrier has been at sea for months and is part of an alarming recent trend in extended deployments without increasing health and safety resources

[WASHINGTON, DC] – U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, wrote Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Acting Secretary of the Navy Hung Cao today demanding to know what action is being taken to improve conditions for sailors deployed on board the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, which has been continuously at sea for a record length of nearly seven months. The deployment was scheduled to end in May but has been extended with no publicly announced return date.

“There have been widespread reports of shortages of basic supplies, water contamination, plumbing issues, deteriorating mental health, deck safety concerns, and disruptions in the mail system, which have caused many care packages in route to the ship to be lost in transit for months,” Blumenthal wrote.

Blumenthal also asked for information about what steps the Navy is taking to prevent similar issues in the future, given that recent carrier deployments have repeatedly stretched long beyond their originally planned durations:

“These reports warrant immediate attention, but they also raise a broader question: whether the Navy can sustain the operational tempo now being demanded of its carrier force, particularly as this Administration repeatedly commits U.S. forces to conflicts of its own choosing and increasingly relies on aircraft carriers to sustain those operations.”

Blumenthal has previously raised concerns regarding the mental health and well-being of sailors facing extended periods of demanding working and living conditions.

In 2022, Xavier Sandor, a Connecticut sailor from Shelton, was one of three USS *George Washington* crew members to die by suicide while the ship was undergoing extended Refueling and Complex Overhaul at a Virginia shipyard. During this time, crew members were subject to frequent interruptions of electrical power, heating, air conditioning and hot water for weeks at a time and no access to welfare or recreation services. Sailors also often experienced a two months long backlog for mental health screenings.

In 2023, Blumenthal fought to include the *Seaman Xavier Sandor Support for Sailors Act* in the Fiscal Year 2024 *National Defense Authorization Act*, allowing junior sailors to live in commercial housing when their assigned ship undergoes an extended maintenance overhaul in a shipyard.

The full text of today's letter is [available here](#) and copied below.

Secretary Hegseth and Acting Secretary Cao,

I write to express serious concerns about the increasing length of Carrier Strike Group deployments and request information regarding the deployment of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN-72). The Lincoln's extended deployment raises broader questions about the Navy's ability to sustainably generate carrier forces while preserving servicemember well-being, maintenance schedules, fleet readiness, and the capacity to respond to future contingencies.

Since departing from departing Naval Base San Diego on November 21, 2025, the USS *Abraham Lincoln* has been deployed more than 250 days as of this writing, despite initially being scheduled for a seven-month deployment. The flagship of Carrier Strike Group 3 has not made a port call in over 200 days, setting a record for consecutive days at sea.

There have been widespread reports of shortages of basic supplies, water contamination, plumbing issues, deteriorating mental health, deck safety concerns, and disruptions in the mail system, which have caused many care packages in route to the ship to be lost in transit for months. These reports warrant immediate attention, but they also raise a broader question: whether the Navy can sustain the operational tempo now being demanded of its carrier force, particularly as this Administration repeatedly commits U.S. forces to conflicts of its own choosing and increasingly relies on aircraft carriers to sustain those operations.

The Lincoln is not an isolated case. Recent carrier deployments have repeatedly stretched beyond their originally anticipated durations, suggesting that extended deployments may be becoming a feature rather than an exception of the Navy's force-generation model. The USS *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN-78) spent 326 days at sea before returning home in May – nearly twice the length of a traditional six-month carrier deployment and the longest modern U.S. carrier deployment since the Vietnam era.

The Lincoln's prolonged deployment is especially significant because it is occurring in the context of continuing military operations against Iran and the possibility that substantial U.S. naval forces will be required in the region for an extended period. The Administration has yet to adequately explain the objectives, end state, or anticipated duration of those operations. If the Administration intends to maintain a prolonged military campaign or an elevated carrier presence in the region, it must explain how it intends to ensure today's operational requirements do not create tomorrow's readiness crisis.

Aircraft carriers are extraordinarily dangerous workplaces under normal conditions. Servicemembers work grueling shifts around jet engines, fuel, weapons, heavy machinery, electrical systems, nuclear propulsion, launching and recovering aircraft, all while remaining under the threat of attack by adversaries. Extended periods at sea can compound those inherent risks through fatigue, deferred maintenance, and reduced opportunities for rest and recovery. The Navy must ensure that decisions to extend carrier deployments account not only for immediate operational requirements, but also for their cumulative effects on crew safety, equipment readiness, maintenance schedules, and the ability of the carrier force to meet future contingencies.

I therefore request that the Department of the Navy provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is the Navy's plan for sustaining carrier strike group presence in the Middle East over the next 12 to 24 months if current operational requirements continue? What carrier rotations are anticipated, and how would those requirements affect planned deployments, maintenance availabilities, and carrier presence in the Indo-Pacific and other theaters?
2. What was the USS Abraham Lincoln's originally scheduled deployment length, and on what dates has the deployment subsequently been extended? Who authorized each extension, and what operational requirements were cited?
3. Please list significant habitability, supply, and quality-of-life problems identified aboard the Lincoln, including shortages of hygiene products, mold, broken toilets or laundry facilities, inadequate water supplies, or other deteriorating living conditions, when these problems were first identified, and what corrective actions have been taken?
4. What metrics is the Navy using to assess fatigue, morale, mental health, and crew readiness aboard the Lincoln? Have commanders identified any increase in safety incidents, medical issues, disciplinary incidents, or other readiness indicators associated with the length of the deployment or consecutive days at sea?
5. Does the Department assess that current demand for aircraft carrier presence exceeds the level that can be sustainably generated under the Navy's existing force structure and deployment model? If so, what changes to force

posture, deployment practices, maintenance capacity, or fleet size does the Department believe are necessary to close that gap?

6. What military objective is the continued deployment of the Lincoln intended to achieve in Iran, and how does the Department assess whether the carrier's continued presence is necessary to accomplish that objective?

The men and women aboard the Lincoln have answered the call to serve their country. The Department owes them not only adequate supplies, maintenance, and support during this deployment, but a sustainable force-generation model that does not rely on repeatedly extending sailors and ships to meet persistent operational demands. The Lincoln's deployment should prompt a broader assessment of whether the Navy's current carrier force structure, maintenance capacity, and deployment model are sufficient for the missions the Department is assigning to the fleet.

Our servicemembers deserve nothing less than the full support of their government—and the American people deserve a military strategy that is worthy of the sacrifices we ask them to make.

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