

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2026

The Honorable Orice W. Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Brown:

I request that the Government Accountability Office review the Department of the Navy's ability to safely and effectively sustain extended ship deployments, and the effect of increasingly prolonged deployments on logistics, maintenance, sailor welfare, readiness, and retention.

This request follows the recent deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72). What was scheduled as a seven-month rotation was extended twice, lasted more than nine months, and included more than 200 consecutive days at sea without a port call.¹ Crew members reportedly faced shortages of food and basic supplies, sustained fatigue, and limited access to mental-health resources.²

The Lincoln's deployment raises a question that extends well beyond a single ship: whether those conditions were an isolated failure or an early indication of what the Navy's current operational tempo will routinely demand, and whether the force is built to absorb it.

I request that the review address the following:

- 1. Extended-deployment decisions and fleet-wide trends.** How the Navy determines whether to extend a deployment beyond its planned duration, what criteria and risk assessments inform those decisions, and what authorities are required to approve them. This should also cover the frequency, duration, and operational causes of extended deployments across the fleet over the past ten years³, whether recent deployments depart significantly from historical patterns, and whether the Navy has set any threshold at which additional time at sea creates unacceptable risk.

1 Priya Sridhar, *Moldy Showers and No Soap: Military Families Are Outraged by Conditions on USS Lincoln*, MS NOW (Aug. 5, 2026), <https://www.ms.now/news/conditions-safety-uss-lincoln-iran-war>.

2 Alex Wilson, *USS Abraham Lincoln Arrives in Thailand for First Full Port Visit After 286 Days at Sea*, Stars & Stripes (Sept. 2, 2026) (reporting 208 consecutive days at sea and the first regular port call in nearly nine months).

3 See U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., *Military Readiness: Navy Is Making Progress Implementing Its Fleet Response Plan, but Has Not Fully Developed Goals, Measures, and Resource Needs*, GAO-08-264, at 8–9 (2008) (describing deployment-length limits and CNO waiver authority); see also Dep't of the Navy, *FY 2017 Budget: Highlights*, at 3–4 (2016) (describing a seven-month deployment goal).

2. **Logistics, resupply, and port-call capacity.** Whether the Navy has sufficient logistics, sealift, replenishment, storage, and forward-support capacity to sustain ships on prolonged deployments. This should include whether stocks of food, potable water, hygiene supplies, and spare parts remain adequate when normal resupply routes or facilities are disrupted, and whether the Navy has the resources and policies to ensure extended deployments allow for port calls, maintenance, and medical care.
3. **Maintenance and force generation.** How prolonged deployments affect preventive and corrective maintenance, equipment condition, and maintenance backlogs⁴, and what those effects mean for a ship's next readiness cycle. The review should also determine whether repeated extensions create a cycle in which high operational demand progressively degrades the Navy's ability to generate ready forces.
4. **Crew staffing, fatigue, and quality of life.** Whether Navy staffing models account for the effects of prolonged deployments on sleep, workload, fatigue, and safety⁵, and whether ships carry enough personnel to sustain extended operations. This should include whether the Navy collects reliable fatigue data, and whether standards governing food, potable water, sanitation, berthing, and communications remain achievable when ships operate continuously at sea for unusually long periods.
5. **Mental-health capacity.** Whether the Navy has sufficient mental- and behavioral-health personnel to support crews on extended deployments, and whether staffing requirements account for deployment length and operational tempo. Sailors' access to confidential care and crisis intervention while deployed should also be assessed.
6. **Retention and personnel outcomes.** The effect of extended deployments on reenlistment, retention, morale, family readiness, medical utilization, and mental health, and whether the Navy tracks these effects and uses them to inform subsequent deployment decisions.⁶

Seven months is a Navy planning goal, not a statutory limit⁷, and nothing defines the point beyond it at which risk to crews and material condition becomes unacceptable. Absent such a standard, each extension is evaluated on operational need alone. I therefore request that GAO recommend measurable standards or benchmarks that Congress and Navy leadership can use to

4 U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., *Navy Readiness: Actions Needed to Address Persistent Maintenance, Training, and Other Challenges Facing the Fleet*, GAO-17-798T (2017), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-798t>.

5 U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., *Navy Readiness: Additional Efforts Are Needed to Manage Fatigue, Reduce Crewing Shortfalls, and Implement Training*, GAO-21-366 (2021), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-366>; *Navy Readiness: Challenges to Addressing Sailor Fatigue in the Surface Fleet Continue*, GAO-24-106819 (2023), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106819>.

6 *Id.*

7 U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., *Military Readiness: Navy Is Making Progress Implementing Its Fleet Response Plan, but Has Not Fully Developed Goals, Measures, and Resource Needs*, GAO-08-264, at 8–9 (2008) (describing deployment-length limits and CNO waiver authority); see also Dep't of the Navy, *FY 2017 Budget: Highlights*, at 3–4 (2016) (describing a seven-month deployment goal).

determine when an extended deployment has exceeded sustainable limits, including measures for deployment duration, crew rest, port-call frequency, logistics reserves, mental-health capacity, maintenance requirements, and post-deployment recovery.

I appreciate GAO's continued work on Navy readiness and on the Department of Defense's capacity to meet sustained operational requirements. This review would give Congress a basis for judging when the Navy has been asked to do more than it can sustain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ruben Gallego". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Ruben Gallego
United States Senator