

Horrific conditions aboard USS Abraham Lincoln: The ruling class's contempt for the troops it sends to war

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16 August 2026

Multiple suicide attempts by sailors on the USS Abraham Lincoln have exposed the unbearable conditions aboard the aircraft carrier that has been deployed for 268 days—200 of those days without a port call—in the US war against Iran.

One sailor attempted suicide by jumping off the Lincoln into the Arabian Sea on August 3. The sailor, who had sought but was denied help for mental health and burnout, was quickly rescued by his shipmates, received a medical evaluation and was taken off the ship.

Although the US Navy has not provided an exact number, reports indicate at least six sailors have attempted or threatened to go overboard during the carrier's record time at sea.

On Sunday, the Guardian reported the accounts of three Navy families with relatives on the Lincoln and the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli. They described men who had lost 20 to 30 pounds. The mother of a Tripoli sailor, herself a six-year Navy veteran, said her son was “emaciated.”

The crisis extends beyond these two ships. The Daily Beast reported Friday that the USS George H.W. Bush, a second aircraft carrier operating in the Arabian Sea, has been at sea 146 days with, in the words of one family member, “virtually no food, water, or soap.”

A sailor aboard the Lincoln wrote to his sister that “the water is so bad that they took out the scuttlebutts”—the ship's drinking fountains. He described the state of mental health care aboard the carrier: “Our deployment resilience counselor quit months ago. To see the ONLY PSYCHIATRIST is a five-week wait unless you do like three of our shipmates and jump off the ship or take 27 sleeping

pills.”

Five thousand sailors live and work on the nuclear-powered Lincoln in 12-hour shifts, beneath a flight deck that fills the ship with deafening noise day and night—sleeping in berthing compartments stacked three bunks high, eating in galleys that serve 15,000 meals a day, exercising in gyms often hotter than 100°F.

The Navy's answer to the crew's deteriorating mental state was a \$200,000 renovation that converted the ship's library spaces into three USO “distress” centers. The Navy has still declined to provide families and sailors with a return date.

While the capitalist politicians and corporate media talk endlessly about “the troops,” the sailors themselves are treated with contempt. Asked by a reporter at Joint Base Andrews on Friday whether the deployment had gone on too long, US President Donald Trump answered, “No, no, no. Not nearly long enough.” This is the response of a psychopathic sadist who does not even pretend to care whether the sailors he has kept at sea for nine months live or die.

Trump speaks for a ruling elite that has sought for thirty-five years—from Iraq in 1991 through Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Ukraine—to offset the decline of American capitalism's world position through military force, and intends to remain at war indefinitely. The assault on Iran is a criminal operation, illegal under both international and American law, that has inflicted mass death and destruction on a country of more than 90 million people. In the calculus of those who direct it, the endlessly glorified “troops” are cannon fodder—an expendable input, like the bombs and the jet fuel—while the Iranian men, women and children on whom the

bombs fall do not figure at all.

The Lincoln itself embodies this history. Launched in 1988, on the eve of the Soviet Union's dissolution, the carrier has served American imperialism through the entire period of war that opened with the Gulf War of 1991. On May 1, 2003, George W. Bush landed on its flight deck and infamously declared beneath a banner reading "Mission Accomplished," "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended." That was a lie.

Twenty-three years later the same ship—with dysfunctional air conditioning, moldy showers, broken toilets and malfunctioning laundry facilities—has been at sea 268 days, logged more than 10,000 sorties against Iran and is now involved in blockading the Strait of Hormuz. Family members, including a Navy-veteran father who told MS NOW his son had personally seen the damage, have reported holes worn through the Lincoln's flight deck after months of heavy bombing missions.

The Costs of War project at Brown University found in 2021 that at least four times as many active-duty troops and veterans of the post-9/11 wars have died by suicide as were killed in combat. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 17 veterans die by suicide every day.

The enlisted sailors aboard the Lincoln, like those across the Navy, are drawn overwhelmingly from working class and lower-middle-income families across the country. They enlist straight out of high school or community college for a steady income, health insurance and the chance at technical training and money for education. A sailor at the lowest enlisted rank, after four months' service, draws base pay of \$2,407.20 a month—for 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, on a warship in a combat zone. A 2022 RAND study found that one in four active-duty service members experiences food insecurity.

Leon Trotsky wrote in *The History of the Russian Revolution* that "an army is always a copy of the society it serves—with this difference, that it gives social relations a concentrated character, carrying both their positive and negative features to an extreme."

A US aircraft carrier with up to twelve F-35C stealth fighters worth more than \$100 million apiece has water that is not fit to drink. A government that estimates the Iran war will cost \$80 billion to \$100 billion leaves a crew of 5,000 men and women assigned a single

psychiatrist with a five-week wait for an appointment.

The billionaire oligarchy that controls the country and placed Donald Trump in the White House for a second term treats the lives of the sailors exactly as it treats the lives of the workers in the warehouses and factories where they come from—as a cost to be minimized.

Representatives of the Democratic Party, who are well aware of the treatment of sailors and soldiers by the Pentagon and White House, are pretending that they just learned about the unbearable conditions aboard the Lincoln. In fact, the only reason they are talking about it is because family members are outraged by the treatment of their loved ones and are demanding answers.

The response of Democratic Senator Ruben Gallego of Arizona, a Marine veteran, is typical. Speaking on ABC "This Week" on Sunday morning, Gallego said that the Trump administration "did not plan for this war, did not plan how to get out of this war." This is not the language of opposition but of support for the continuation of the war.

Most revealing was Gallego's worry about what happens "when they get back to home... is it worth rejoining?" His concern is not the sailors but the recruiting station: that the exposure of these conditions will undermine the military's ability to enlist young people for the escalating global war.

The war against Iran, and the wars being prepared against Russia and China, can be stopped only by the international working class taking political power out of the hands of the financial oligarchy and reorganizing economic life on socialist foundations.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties fight for the immediate end of the war against Iran, the lifting of the blockade, the withdrawal of American forces from the Middle East, opposition to Washington's preparations for war against Russia and China, and the unity of American and Iranian workers against the war.



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