

Hegseth Visits USS Lincoln Ahead of Homecoming After Record-Breaking Deployment



Secretary of War Pete Hegseth boarded the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln at sea today, one day prior to the ship returning to its home port of San Diego.

Hegseth's visit came at the end of Lincoln's record-setting 321-day deployment, during which the ship spent 264 consecutive days at sea without a port call. This deployment surpasses the previous record of 206 consecutive days set by the carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in 2020.

The secretary spent most of his nearly 15 minutes of remarks praising the Lincoln's crew and its attached Carrier Air Wing 9 for the successes the ship's strike group achieved off the coast of Iran as part of Operation Epic Fury from February

through August. Those operations consisted of 40 straight days of combat operations beginning Feb. 28, followed by participation in an ongoing, monthslong blockade of Iran in and around the Strait of Hormuz.

"Here we are this morning – on this beautiful morning – we came here intentionally to recognize, to honor to showcase. ... wanted me to personally thank you, each and every one of you, from the Oval Office for what you have done here, for what you did in Epic Fury, ensuring that Iran never gets a nuclear weapon. ... And then the follow-on blockade, which has been impenetrable from day one," Hegseth told the crew.

He also recounted all of the strike group's achievements over the six months: conducting 3,693 combat sorties, delivering 1.37 million pounds of ordnance, launching 450 Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles, shooting down 77 one-way unmanned attack drones, sinking 64 Iranian warships, destroying 21 anti-ship cruise missiles and defending against four fast-attack craft and explosive-carrying wooden sailing vessels.

Regarding the thousands of sorties, Hegseth pointed out that the flights occurred without a single aircraft mishap.

Speaking of the dangers the Lincoln crew endured during their deployment, Hegseth drew a comparison between delivering remarks off the coast of California and what it was like to be in combat conditions.

"We landed on the most beautiful of days, in the middle of an empty flight deck because is gone, and landing in the middle of the night in dangerous territory with a full flight deck during combat operations, and you didn't miss a beat," Hegseth told the crew.

"That's why we're here; the world needs to understand that, the country needs to understand that," he added.

In recognition of the Lincoln strike group's successes in

prosecuting Operation Epic Fury for more than five months in the Middle East, Hegseth presented the crew with the Presidential Unit Citation – the highest military decoration that can be awarded to units for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy.

“I draw inspiration from the mission that you executed so successfully. You have changed the arc of history: ensuring that crazy people – theocrats – never get a nuclear weapon changes the arc of history. ... And it’s because of what this strike group has done, and other great Americans are still doing now,” Hegseth told the crowd.

He added that he was also very grateful for the support shown by the crew’s family members during the strike group’s long deployment.

“So, if you would, when you greet your families tomorrow, just pass my gratitude from the president and myself,” Hegseth said.

“Let them know their long wait, we believe, was in service of a righteous and historic mission,” he added.

This was by no means the only lengthy deployment the Lincoln has been on over the course of its service.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ship was deployed for 294 days between 2019 and 2020. It was deployed for 290 days between July 2002 and May 2003 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

By Matthew Olay, Oct. 7, 2026