



Nuclear deterrence: Macron observes the launch of the M51.3 ballistic missile

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PARIS – A surprise off Finistère, in northwestern France. President **Emmanuel Macron** this morning observed, aboard a **French Navy frigate**, the **first test launch** of the new version of the submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile (SLBM): the **M51.3**.

The Head of State's presence **had not been announced** for security reasons, and the exercise was conducted **without media presence**. As stated by the Ministry of the Armed Forces, the missile **carried no nuclear warhead** and splashed down in the **North Atlantic, several hundred kilometers from any coastline**.

The geopolitical context: offering Europe a "nuclear shield"

Today's missile test carries major strategic and symbolic significance. It is part of the proposal put forward by **Emmanuel Macron** to other European countries for a **French-led "nuclear**

umbrella".

In response to shifting international balances and uncertainty over future NATO coverage by the United States, Paris has offered its continental partners – first and foremost **Germany** and other allied countries – the option of integrating France's deterrent force into Europe's collective security architecture.

- **Allied involvement:** The initiative calls for joint exercises, the temporary deployment of strategic fighter aircraft, and the conventional participation of European allies in deterrence maneuvers.
- **Decision-making sovereignty:** Despite cooperation and the extension of protection to European partners, **exclusive control over the "nuclear button" remains firmly in the hands of the French presidency.**
- **Alternative or complement to NATO:** Paris's stated objective is not to replace NATO, but to create an **autonomous and complementary European defense pillar** based on the only nuclear arsenal remaining within the European Union.

What is the M51 intercontinental missile?

The **M51** is the backbone of the maritime component of the **French nuclear deterrent** (*Force océanique stratégique* - FOST). Developed by aerospace giant **ArianeGroup**, it is a three-stage solid-propellant ballistic missile launched from the nuclear submarines of the **Le Triomphant** class.

Specifications and performance

- **Type:** Strategic **Sea-to-Land (SLBM)** ballistic missile.
- **Dimensions:** Approximately **12 meters long, 2.3 meters in diameter**, and with a launch weight **exceeding 50 tons**.
- **Range:** Estimated at between **9,000 and 10,000 km**, enabling it to strike targets almost anywhere in the world directly from patrol areas in the Atlantic.
- **Speed:** Reaches hypersonic speeds **in excess of Mach 20** during atmospheric reentry.
- **Payload:** Carries **6 to 10 nuclear warheads** with independently targetable reentry vehicles (**MIRV**), allowing a single missile to engage multiple distinct targets.

The new M51.3 variant: evolution and capabilities

The test conducted this morning marks the **first operational launch of the M51.3 version**, the technological upgrade introduced by the French Ministry of Defense to modernize the country's nuclear arsenal.

The main technological developments include:

1. **Greater range and accuracy:** Optimization of the **missile's third stage**, together with next-generation satellite and inertial navigation systems.
2. **Missile-defense penetration capability:** Designed with advanced countermeasures to **evade today's anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense shields**.
3. **New TNO warheads:** Configured to carry the new oceanic nuclear warheads, **TNO (*Tête Nucléaire Océanique*)**.

The successful outcome of the test reaffirms not only the full operational effectiveness of France's missile force, but also underscores the political message France intends to send to the rest of Europe and global adversaries: **to ensure an autonomous, modern, and credible nuclear deterrent to protect the continent**.