# US Test Launch of Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM)

#### 1.Introduction

- The United States successfully conducted a test launch of its Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) from Vandenberg Space Force Base, California, on November 5, 2025.
- The unarmed missile flew approximately 7,500 km and hit its target near the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site in the Marshall Islands.
- The test came days after former President Donald Trump's call for resuming nuclear testing, making it a strategically significant event.

## 2. Purpose of the Test

- The US Air Force clarified that the test (code-named **GT 254**) was a **routine reliability and accuracy assessment**, planned months in advance.
- Lt. Col. Karrie Wray, commander of the 576th Flight Test Squadron, stated that the test aimed to "verify and validate the ICBM system's ability to perform its critical mission."
- These regular launches help:
  - Evaluate the **readiness and reliability** of the nuclear deterrent.
  - Collect data for maintenance and modernisation of the missile system.
  - Demonstrate operational capability to allies and adversaries alike.

#### 3. The Minuteman III Missile: Overview

• Type: Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM)

• Operational Since: 1970s

Manufacturer: Boeing

- Range: Up to 13,000 kilometres
- **Payload:** Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs), capable of carrying **3 nuclear warheads** (though limited to 1 under arms treaties).
- **Propulsion:** Three-stage solid-fuel rocket.
- Significance: Forms the land-based leg of the US nuclear triad, alongside:
  - Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs)
  - Strategic bombers

# 4. Strategic Context and Timing

- The test followed **President Donald Trump's public statement** calling for **renewed nuclear readiness** and possible **resumption of nuclear testing**.
- The timing sparked international attention, raising debates on whether it was a signal of strategic assertiveness amid global tensions with Russia and China.
- While the US maintained that it was a pre-scheduled test, analysts viewed it as part of a larger narrative of deterrence and modernisation.

# 5. Trump's Statements: Dual Approach

 President Trump emphasised a balance between strength and peace, stating:

"We could blow up the world 150 times. There's no need for this. I want peace all over the world."

- He asserted that the tests were **not acts of aggression**, but steps to maintain **credible deterrence**.
- Trump also reiterated interest in arms control and denuclearisation dialogues with Russia and China, highlighting America's "unmatched nuclear capability".

# 6. Non-Nuclear Nature of the Test

• Energy Secretary Chris Wright clarified that the Minuteman III tests are non-nuclear, meaning:

- No fissile material (plutonium or uranium) is used.
- Tests assess delivery systems, guidance accuracy, and component reliability.
- These evaluations form part of the **"Stockpile Stewardship Program"**, which ensures nuclear weapon reliability **without actual detonations**.

## 7. Future Modernisation Plans

- The US aims to replace the Minuteman III with the LGM-35A Sentinel ICBM by around 2030, as part of its nuclear modernisation programme.
- The upgrade involves:
  - Advanced propulsion systems
  - Improved targeting and guidance
  - Enhanced cybersecurity to resist modern threats
- The broader modernisation also covers:
  - New Columbia-class submarines (replacing Ohio-class)
  - B-21 Raider stealth bombers
  - Upgraded nuclear command and control systems

# 8. Strategic Implications

- For the US:
  - Reinforces **nuclear deterrence** and technological dominance.
  - Ensures continued **credibility of the triad** despite ageing systems.
- For Global Security:
  - May raise concerns among other nuclear powers (Russia, China, North Korea).
  - Could fuel a new arms race, especially amid tensions in Ukraine,
    South China Sea, and Taiwan Strait.

#### For Arms Control:

Poses challenges to existing treaties such as New START, which is due

for renewal.

• Undermines efforts toward **global nuclear disarmament**.

#### 9. Exam-Oriented Facts

**Target Site** 

**Test Code** 

**Type** 

Purpose

Missile Range

**Organising Unit** 

**Successor Missile** 

Flight Distance (Test)

Aspect Details

**Event** Test launch of Minuteman III ICBM

Date November 5, 2025

**Location** Vandenberg Space Force Base, California

Marshall Islands (Ronald Reagan Missile

Test Site)

GT 254

~13,000 km

~7,500 km

Unarmed (non-nuclear) test

576th Flight Test Squadron

Routine reliability and accuracy test LGM-35A Sentinel (expected by 2030)

# 10. Broader Analysis (UPSC Perspective)

## A. For GS Paper 2 - International Relations

- Reflects the **realpolitik** nature of nuclear diplomacy.
- Raises questions about the **future of arms control agreements**.
- Demonstrates **strategic signalling** amid shifting global power equations.

#### B. For GS Paper 3 - Science & Tech / Internal Security

- Illustrates advances in missile technology and deterrence systems.
- Showcases solid-fuel propulsion and MIRV technology.
- Highlights the balance between defence modernisation and disarmament goals.

#### 11. Conclusion

The Minuteman III test highlights the delicate balance between maintaining strategic deterrence and pursuing global disarmament.

While officially a **routine test**, its **timing and symbolism** underscore the **renewed nuclear assertiveness** among major powers.

For the global community, it raises vital questions about the **future of nuclear arms** control, the **risk of escalation**, and the **challenge of sustaining peace in a** 

# multipolar world.

# 12. Possible UPSC Questions

## (a) Mains (GS Paper 3):

"Routine strategic weapons testing often carries deeper geopolitical implications."

Discuss in the context of the 2025 Minuteman III ICBM test by the United States.

## (b) Prelims / Objective:

Which of the following statements regarding the Minuteman III ICBM is correct?

- 1. It is a submarine-launched ballistic missile.
- 2. It has a range of about 13,000 km.
- 3. It forms part of the US nuclear triad.

☐ Answer: (2) and (3) only.

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