



OVERSEAS TERRITORIES: THE FRANCE AT THE OTHER ENDS OF THE WORLD

The sun never sets on France, thanks to its overseas territories. Present on all the world's oceans, the country can count on the potential of areas to explore, as well as on different anchor and refueling points... Now more than ever a necessity for globalization cannot do without the sea.

A STRATEGIC ASSET

From the origin, the French overseas territories have seen their strategic importance grow continuously. Their exclusive economic zones allow France to place second among the largest maritime areas in the world, behind the US and ahead of Australia. The country has, in each area of the world - except the Arctic, but Saint Pierre and Miquelon is not far - territories that give it a cultural, political and economic diversity. They also provide a valuable logistics network for the French armed forces who can rely on essential if not vital support points on all oceans. With a continuous presence in all regions of the world, the French Navy can build special relationships with its neighbours' navies. This leads to many neighbourhood cooperation initiatives, as with Australia in the field of the fight against illegal fishing, or with some Caribbean states against drug trafficking.

AN ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE

Given the numerous hydrocarbon exploration campaigns, overseas territories already seem to offer a promising potential for France. Guyana and the Iles Eparses ("Scattered Islands") - especially Juan de Nova - represent the most tangible hope. The Guyanese reserve has indeed been estimated at around 300 million barrels and Juan de Nova's potential currently attracts the attention: the Ministers of Ecology and Economy have recently extended the exclusive exploration permits for oil and gas in the area.

But the overseas EEZ are not rich in oil only: they also concentrate 80% of the French biodiversity. So many fish stocks that may now be exploited for food, pharmaceutical or cosmetics. The Kerguelen and Crozet Islands represent the largest toothfish stock in the world: a popular fish and one of the priciest on the market. As for the waters of Clipperton, they are full of tuna.

The seabed of overseas EEZs is also subject to special attention from researchers, as it is likely to host significant mineral resources. Hydrothermal sulphides have for example been identified in Polynesia and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF). An exploration program focused on polymetallic nodules was also launched in Wallis and Futuna in 2010 and has discovered the first hydrothermal mineralization deposits in the French EEZ. But while exploration clearly progresses, exploitation, although technically possible, still proves very expensive.

Moreover, special characteristics of overseas areas make possible the exploitation of the marine environment for the development of renewable energies and contribute to the country's energetic autonomy. In Martinique, the DCNS Nemo power plant plans to draw on ocean thermal energy for

continuous production of electricity. In Guadeloupe, EDF is studying the setup of an energy transfer by pumping station (STEP). This hydroelectric system modulates the production of electricity by storing water reserves and using them on demand. Reunion Island, meanwhile, seems suitable for the exploitation of wave energy.

ADVANTAGES TO PROTECT

But these significant assets can inflame passions. Illegal and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which affects Guyana, TAAF and Pacific territories, is the obvious example. That's why the Navy and other public administrations involved in the organization of the maritime action have launched an extensive program for the renewal of their overseas capabilities. Multi-mission ships (B2M) will thus shortly be assigned to New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Reunion and the Antilles, pending the delivery of new surveillance and maritime response ships (Batsimar). A new Astrolabe support ship will be responsible for fueling the Dumont d'Urville base, in Adélie Land, Antarctica, also replacing the Albatros for support and surveillance missions in the TAAF. These capabilities need however to be maintained and developed to preserve the treasures of overseas France.



Dauphin N3 (©Marine nationale)

For further reading :

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