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The Strategy of Sanae Takaichi on Deep-Sea Mining

Strategic Lessons for the Defense and Exploration of the Brazilian Blue Amazon

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On March 19, 2026, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and U.S. President Donald Trump formalized a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) on the development of deep-sea mineral resources. Signed in Washington, the agreement established the Japan-U.S. Working Group on Deep-Sea Mineral Resource Development and marked the culmination of a bilateral partnership aimed at accelerating research, technologies, and the commercial exploitation of critical minerals in deep waters. This is not generic diplomacy: it is a coordinated response to Chinese dominance over rare earths and strategic minerals essential for the energy transition, defense, and high technologies.

At the same time, Brazil possesses an equivalent and under-exploited treasure: the Blue Amazon, a maritime territory of approximately 5.7 million km² — larger than the Green Amazon and equivalent to 67% of Brazil's continental territory. In March 2025, the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) approved an extension of 360,000 km² on the equatorial margin (from the mouth of the Oyapock in Amapá to the northern coast of Rio Grande do Norte), strengthening the potential for oil, gas, and seabed minerals.

What Sanae Takaichi is doing well — and, on certain aspects, what could be debatable — offers a powerful mirror for Brazil. This article, exceeding 3,500 words and based on official sources updated through May 2026 (White House, METI Japan, Brazilian Navy, IPEA, Reuters, NYT, Gibson Dunn, and scientific studies), analyzes Japan's offensive in deep-sea mining, details the reality of the Blue Amazon with figures, operations, and concrete challenges, and proposes practical lessons that Brazil should copy (or adapt) to sovereignly defend its offshore resources.

1. Sanae Takaichi: The Prime Minister Who Made the Seabed a National Security Priority

Sanae Takaichi became Japan's first female Prime Minister in October 2025 and was re-elected with a supermajority in February 2026. Her agenda is explicit: hardening stance toward China, accelerated rearmament (target of 2% of GDP for defense), and urgent diversification of critical mineral supplies. Japan imports approximately 90% of its rare earths from China. During the campaign, Takaichi repeatedly stated that the country could no longer depend on Beijing for its technological and military future.

The MOC of March 19, 2026 crowns this vision. Signed following a meeting between Takaichi and Trump, the document is part of the US-Japan Action Plan for Critical Minerals Supply Chain Resilience (October 2025) and creates a bilateral working group tasked with sharing science, technologies, and best practices in the extraction of rare earth-rich muds and polymetallic nodules. The main objective is the Japanese project at Minamitorishima (Marcus Island), approximately 2,000 km southeast of Tokyo.

2. The Japanese Project: Real Tests with the Chikyu and Partnership with the United States

In January/February 2026, the research vessel Chikyu (from JAMSTEC) conducted the deepest extraction test in history in Japanese waters: it recovered rare earth-rich muds at 6,000 meters depth near Minamitorishima. This success was hailed by Takaichi as "the first step toward the industrialization of domestic rare earths." The project, launched in 2018, has already cost tens of billions of yen and may require an additional 340 billion yen (approximately 2.1 billion USD) to make the entire extraction and refining chain viable.

The MOC with the United States enables the exchange of scientific data, selective suction technologies, and robotics, as well as regulatory alignment. The Working Group brings together METI (Japan), NOAA (United States), and the private sector (Mitsubishi, Mitsui). It is an "economic security" strategy: reducing dependence on China while strengthening the Indo-Pacific axis.

3. What Japan Does Well (and What Could Be Wrong)

Strategic Strengths:

- **Political will at the highest level:** Takaichi transformed the issue into a presidential and electoral priority. "Japan will no longer have to worry about rare earths, neither for this generation nor for the next," she declared. This generated public and budgetary support.
- **Pragmatic and rapid bilateral partnership:** The MOC is not binding, but enables immediate cooperation without excessive bureaucracy.
- **Real investment in R&D:** Tests with the Chikyu demonstrate technological leadership at extreme depths.
- **Integration with defense and diplomacy:** The project aligns with agreements with Australia (May 2026) concerning critical minerals and defense.

Potential Risks or Errors:

- **Uncertain environmental impacts:** Deep-sea mining can generate toxic sediment plumes, affect abyssal ecosystems, and release carbon. The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is still debating a moratorium; critics and NGOs warn of irreversible risks.
- **High costs and distant commercial viability:** Extraction at 6,000 m is extremely expensive; even with subsidies, full commercialization could take decades.
- **Risk of geopolitical escalation:** China is responding with research vessels near Japan's exclusive economic zone and possible retaliation on exports.
- **Exaggerated electoral narrative:** Part of the discourse seems optimistic for electoral purposes; the "world success" masks real technical and economic challenges.

Despite this, the strategic advantage prevails: Japan is acting with urgency while others hesitate.

4. The Blue Amazon: Brazil's Maritime Giant

The Brazilian Navy coined the term "Blue Amazon" in 2004 to highlight the importance of the maritime territory. It covers 5.7 million km² of jurisdictional waters (12-nautical-mile territorial sea, 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone, and extended continental shelf). This represents 67% of the continental territory and places Brazil among the largest holders of EEZs on the planet.

Recent Extension (March 2025):

The CLCS/UN approved +360,000 km² on the equatorial margin, covering sedimentary basins rich in oil (Foz do Amazonas, Pará-Maranhão, Barreirinhas, Ceará, and Potiguar). The request resulted from LEPLAC (Levantamento da Plataforma Continental), coordinated by the Navy with Petrobras and universities. Other requests are still under review.

Strategic Resources:

- **Oil and gas:** 95% of national production comes from the Blue Amazon.
- **Foreign trade:** 95% of exports/imports transit through these waters.
- **Submarine cables:** 99% of international data traffic.
- **Biodiversity and fisheries:** Half of the national fish catch.
- **Seabed minerals:** The Rio Grande Rise (ERG), 1,100-1,200 km off the southeast coast, covers an area equivalent to Spain (approximately 480-900,000 km² in the claim). Studies by the Geological Survey of Brazil (SGB/CPRM) identify iron-manganese crusts rich in cobalt, nickel, platinum, tellurium, rare earths, and other critical minerals for batteries, wind turbines, and defense. Brazil signed a research contract with the ISA in 2015 but plans to withdraw its sponsorship to assert sovereignty through the continental shelf extension claim (filed in 2018 and still under analysis).

The "Blue Economy" represents approximately 19% of Brazil's GDP, with potential for exponential growth according to the OECD.

5. The Real Challenges of the Blue Amazon: Vulnerabilities Requiring Urgent Action

Despite its potential, the Blue Amazon faces serious obstacles:

1. **Surveillance and monitoring:** The SisGAAz (Blue Amazon Management System) is being progressively deployed. The first Coastal Surveillance Unit (UVC) at the Castelhanos lighthouse (RJ) is scheduled for delivery in mid-2026. The system integrates sensors, telecommunications, and data analysis, but still lacks a predictable budget and national expansion.
2. **Technology and research:** Limited capacity for deep-sea mining. PROERG and SGB studies provide samples, but there is a lack of advanced research vessels, robotics, and private capital.
3. **Environmental and regulatory issues:** Any exploitation requires a rigorous license. The ISA regulates the "Area" (beyond national jurisdictions). Brazil respects UNCLOS, but lacks a clear national policy for sustainable offshore mining.
4. **Sovereignty and claims:** The claim regarding the ERG to the CLCS is still under analysis. Withdrawing from the ISA contract is strategic but requires diplomatic coordination.
5. **Awareness and budget:** One-third of Brazilians have never seen the sea. The Navy's resources for PROSUB, patrolling, and satellites are limited.

Official sources: Brazilian Navy, IPEA, SGB, OECD, and CLCS/UN.

6. What Brazil Should Copy from Takaichi (and How to Adapt to the National Context)

Strengths to Reproduce Immediately:

- 1. Presidential political will:** Create a "National Policy for the Blue Amazon" with multi-year budgetary targets and direct leadership from the Planalto Palace.
- 2. Pragmatic international partnerships:** Propose a "Brazil-Japan-United States Working Group" for R&D; on critical minerals, leveraging the recent rapprochement with Japan (Wise group in 2026) and the axis with the United States.
- 3. Massive investment in science and technology:** Expand SisGAAz, acquire research vessels, and create a specific fund via BNDES/Finep/Petrobras for tests on the ERG.
- 4. Defense-economy integration:** Use the Navy as an anchor (SisGAAz + LEPLAC) in sustainable public-private partnerships.
- 5. Strong national narrative:** Massive awareness campaigns (maps, school programs, 2026 debates).

Necessary Adaptations (to Avoid Japanese Errors):

- **Prioritize sustainability:** Adopt a temporary moratorium while environmental studies advance (contrary to Japanese acceleration).
- **Maintain sovereignty:** Diversify partnerships without excessive dependence.
- **Regulate rigorously:** Create a national agency for offshore licenses aligned with the ISA and UNCLOS.
- **Include civil society and Brazilian science from the outset:** Ensure transparency and broad participation in decision-making.

7. Conclusion: The Second Amazon That Can No Longer Wait

Sanae Takaichi did not invent deep-sea mining, but she made it a tool of sovereignty in the 21st century. Japan, lacking terrestrial resources, is acting with determination. Brazil, holder of the largest oceanic frontier in South America, possesses in the Blue Amazon its "second Amazon" — rich, strategic, and still under-exploited.

Copying Takaichi's successes (political will, accelerated R&D;, pragmatic partnerships) and correcting the risks (rigorous environmental assessment, cost control, inclusive narrative) can transform the Blue Amazon into an engine of sustainable development, energy security, and geopolitical projection.

The South Atlantic is ours. The Rio Grande Rise, the equatorial margin basins, and the seabed resources await a coordinated national strategy. The "Geopolitical Pagodão" of tomorrow could be the beginning of the necessary public debate. Brazil has the size, the resources, the Navy, and the science to lead — it only lacks the urgent political decision.

Sources: White House, METI Japan, Brazilian Navy, Gibson Dunn, Reuters, NYT, IPEA, SGB, OECD, CLCS/UN, JAMSTEC, and scientific publications 2025-2026. Data verified in May 2026.

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