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Thales Moves to Buy Exail to Build France's Unmanned Mine Warfare and Seabed Security Chain.

* 7 Jul, 2026 - 16:35

* [Naval News Navy 2026](/news/navy-news/2026)

****Thales has moved to take control of Exail Technologies, the French maritime robotics and navigation specialist, through a binding agreement to buy the Gorgé family's 35.51% stake before launching a mandatory offer for the whole company. Announced in Meudon on July 6, 2026, the deal would give Thales direct access to unmanned mine countermeasure systems, inertial navigation technology, and autonomous maritime vehicles that strengthen its position in underwater warfare.****

The acquisition would combine Exail's mine detection, classification, navigation, and neutralization capabilities with Thales' sonar and command-and-control portfolio. For Western navies, the operational value lies in a more integrated French-controlled package for seabed security, mine warfare, and autonomous maritime operations at a time when underwater threats are becoming more central to naval deterrence.

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[![Thales' planned acquisition of Exail would combine French sonar, command-and-control, autonomous mine countermeasure, and inertial navigation capabilities, strengthening Europe's underwater warfare and seabed security industrial base (Picture source: Exail).](/images/stories/news/2026/july/Thales%20Moves%20to%20Buy%20Exail%20to%20Build%20France%20Unmanned%20Mine%20Warfare%20and%20Seabed%20Security%20Chain.jpg)]

Thales' planned acquisition of Exail would combine French sonar, command-and-control, autonomous mine countermeasure, and inertial navigation capabilities, strengthening Europe's underwater warfare and seabed security industrial base (Picture source: Exail).

Exail is not an armament company in the conventional sense of guns, missiles, or torpedoes. Its military value is concentrated in the mine warfare kill chain: survey the seabed, detect a mine-like object, classify

it, identify it, and neutralize it without sending a crewed minehunter or divers into the minefield. Its UMIS unmanned mine countermeasures system is built around unmanned surface vessels, autonomous underwater vehicles, remotely operated vehicles, towed sonar, mine identification vehicles, the K-Ster mine neutralization ROV, and the Umisoft mission software suite. That structure matters because mine warfare is a sequencing problem as much as a weapons problem; a navy that cannot move from detection to neutralization quickly may clear water too slowly to support an amphibious landing, port reopening, or chokepoint transit. It also reflects the wider move away from dedicated minehunter hulls toward modular unmanned systems that can be deployed from ships of opportunity or shore-based command nodes.

The closest element to “armament” in Exail’s line is the K-Ster C mine disposal vehicle, an expendable remotely operated vehicle carrying a shaped-charge warhead filled with insensitive explosive. Exail’s datasheet gives a length of 1,500 mm, height of 445 mm, weight in air of 55 kg, lithium-ion battery, four thrusters, dual-frequency sonar, day/night color camera with searchlight, USBL acoustic positioning, one hour of endurance, speed up to 5 knots, 300 m maximum operating depth, and an operating range up to 1,500 m. The warhead head can tilt from +90° to -90°, which is tactically important because a mine may be lying on the seabed, moored in the water column, partly buried, or positioned at an angle where a fixed-charge vehicle would be less effective. In practical terms, K-Ster C gives a mine warfare commander a stand-off effector that can be launched from a mine countermeasure vessel, RHIB, or unmanned surface vessel while the control station remains outside the danger area.

The detection layer is provided by vehicles such as the A18-M autonomous underwater vehicle, which Exail describes as a mid-size AUV for mine countermeasures. The A18-M can operate for up to 24 hours at 3 knots, cover 20 to 40 km² per mission, work down to 300 m, and carry the UMISAS interferometric synthetic aperture sonar with 3 cm by 3 cm resolution for small and irregular objects. These figures explain why navies are adopting AUVs for mine warfare: endurance and sonar stability allow wide-area seabed mapping before a commander decides where to send an identification ROV or a disposal vehicle. The operational gain is time. A force can survey a channel, anchorage, or landing approach without placing a frigate, amphibious ship, or mine countermeasure vessel inside the suspected mine line.

Exail’s DriX unmanned surface vessel family adds the surface control and persistence component. The DriX series is listed with more than 300,000 hours at sea, more than one million nautical miles of autonomous navigation, operation in more than 25 countries, and versions ranging from the 7.71 m DriX H-8 to the 15.75 m DriX O-16, with endurance figures of under 10, under 20, and under 30 days depending on version and mission configuration. DriX can serve as a surface communications and positioning gateway for AUVs and ROVs, using line-of-sight and over-the-horizon links, including 4G/5G, radio, satellite communications, and encrypted remote monitoring. For mine warfare or seabed infrastructure protection, that means the command node does not need to be a large warship close to the threat; it can be a shore station, support vessel, or task group command element receiving data from unmanned surface and underwater vehicles.

For Thales, the acquisition brings three measurable additions to its portfolio. First, it adds Exail’s mature unmanned mine countermeasure products to Thales’ underwater sensor and mission system business. Second, it adds fiber-optic gyroscope inertial navigation to Thales’ ring-laser gyroscope base, giving the group coverage of two high-end navigation technologies used in submarines, surface ships, aircraft, land vehicles, missiles, and unmanned systems operating in GNSS-denied conditions. Third, it adds Exail’s photonics, optical components, quantum sensor work, and vertically integrated production base. Exail reported €479 million in 2025 revenue, more than 2,200 employees, customers in nearly 80 countries, and an 11% 2025 adjusted EBIT margin under Thales’ definition; Exail also reported €844 million in 2025 order intake and €103 million in current EBITDA.

The acquisition also builds on an existing industrial relationship rather than starting from zero. In November 2024, Thales and Exail were selected by France’s DGA to deliver eight AUVs, with eight more as options, for the French Navy’s SLAMF mine countermeasures program. That solution uses an extended

A18-M integrating Thales’ SAMDIS 600 sonar, MiMAP sonar analysis software, and AI-driven algorithms for mine detection and classification. This is the clearest indication of the strategy behind the deal: Thales is moving from supplying sensors and mission systems to owning a larger share of the unmanned vehicle, navigation, software, and effector chain. The same trend is visible across naval modernization programs focused on undersea infrastructure protection, mine clearance, and autonomous seabed surveillance, where navies need persistent, distributed systems that can inspect, map, and clear underwater areas without committing crewed ships at the first stage of an operation.

The strategic logic is therefore more specific than a general expansion into drones. Thales is buying a company whose products address two operational problems that are becoming harder for NATO and partner navies: clearance of increasingly sophisticated naval mines and navigation in environments where satellite signals are jammed, spoofed, or unavailable underwater. The announced synergy targets—€500 million in additional revenue within ten years, more than €60 million in additional adjusted EBIT by 2030, and €90 million by 2032—show that Thales expects both sales growth and internal integration benefits. The operational risk is integration pace; the acquisition only creates value for customers if Thales can preserve Exail’s engineering speed while aligning it with a larger defense prime’s procurement, security, and export processes. If that balance is achieved, Thales would control a more complete European underwater warfare chain, from sonar data collection and inertial navigation to autonomous mission control and mine neutralization.

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Written by Evan Lerouvillois, Defense Analyst.

Evan studied International Relations, and quickly specialized in defense and security. He is particularly interested in the influence of the defense sector on global geopolitics, and analyzes how technological innovations in defense, arms export contracts, and military strategies influence the international geopolitical scene.

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