

Just coasting?

Although the potential for attacks in maritime zones is growing, budgetary considerations frequently mean there are scarce resources to counter such threats. *IMPS* considers how agencies responsible for protecting coastal waters are facing this challenge. **By Phil Rood**

For most states, the possession of powerful warships often provides populations with a reassurance that they are well protected from growing security threats that have become something of an accepted feature of contemporary times. In the environment of international diplomacy, a capable navy provides an effective cloak of protection.

However, the reality that today's threats are more prevalent in domestic rather than international waters is sometimes forgotten or ignored. The risk of a maritime criminal or terrorist operating closer to shore means that

everyday security is focused as much on policing authorities patrolling littoral waters as navies in the blue-water environment.

Feeling the pressure

Police, border forces and coast guards have all been tasked with an increasing sphere of responsibility that has expanded way beyond illicit trade to include humanitarian

issues, terrorist threats and the pernicious activities of human and drug traffickers.

There are few coastal states unaffected by such issues – failing to counter them effectively places their populations in considerable danger. Yet, with such a potential impact, it is surprising that the resources required often fall victim to the cost pressures that plague today's governments. Making do with existing platforms, fewer personnel and a reduced depth of capability have become dilemmas that are common to maritime policing authorities throughout the world, while governments often ignore their complaints until the single, shattering incident that creates a public outcry and recrimination.

Nick Childs, senior fellow, naval forces and maritime security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the biggest threat in coastal waters is still organised crime rather than the maritime terrorist threat that was widely forecast to ▶



Two Scimitar-class patrol boats form the basis of the UK RN's Gibraltar squadron. (Photo: Crown copyright/UK MoD)