Enhancing coastal security: The general public as resilient citizens.

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Issue 12 of the CTPSR’s maritime security briefings on enhancing UK coastal security acknowledged the need for greater maritime domain awareness, but argued that this could not be attained through more coastal patrol vessels alone. One additional means through which greater awareness can be attained is by drawing upon enhanced technology such as satellites. New technology can provide vast swathes of data, yet this data can, if not carefully managed, lack the nuance that comes from understanding the specific context associated with a local environment. Here though the general public, working and living in coastal areas, have a valuable and crucial role to play. It is a more active security role however, and one that highlights the ongoing blurring of the security relationship between state and citizen.

In the UK maritime domain, coastal awareness initiatives that seek to involve the general public are well established, albeit with a tendency to be re-launched by lead government agencies. More specifically, Project Kraken has been the initiative pursued by many coastal Police forces. In Suffolk for example, Kraken was launched in April 2009 and encouraged those who worked or enjoyed the maritime environment “to be extra vigilant to counter the threat of terrorism”, and to report activity or behaviour that was deemed to be “suspicious and which may be connected with acts (or preparatory acts) of terrorism or serious crime”. The wider maritime community – including volunteer coastguards, harbour masters, private yacht club representatives, pleasure craft owners, alongside members of the public living in coastal areas – were provided with a telephone hotline and on occasion an electronic submission system for providing information on suspicious behaviour and even possible hostile reconnaissance to the authorities. In return the constabulary provided regular updates on security issues in the specific area through community liaison meetings.

The opportunities provided by projects such as Kraken to enhance maritime domain awareness are clear. By drawing upon those individuals and organisations who understand a specific coastal area and who are therefore more likely to recognise activities outside of the norm, there is greater potential for the authorities to be able to build up a more accurate intelligence picture, be that around terrorism or maritime crime. When a country has a significant coastline, including many small harbours and inlets that could be exploited, local knowledge is invaluable. Yet, drawing upon the public more in the pursuit of enhanced security is not without consequences. At its most basic Project Kraken is a further illustration of the way in which the maritime zone of security has been extended outwards; in this case from small ports, to harbours and even coastal communities in general. Perhaps more significantly, Kraken illustrates the way in which the public are not simply expected to be passive receivers of information but are also asked to take on an increasingly proactive role in relation to security provision.

Within the UK this expanding public security role has most clearly been seen in wider responses to international terrorism. As I have discussed in my analysis of Project Argus - a UK government initiative that seeks to foster increased resilience in and around crowded places in the face of terrorist attack - we are increasingly witnessing the emergence of the ‘resilient citizen’. This can be defined as a member of the public working in and around a perceived vulnerable space, trained and encouraged by the state to pursue a more active form of enhanced preparedness in order to handle emergencies more
more effectively. Although projects such as Kraken do not represent as significant a shift to the resilient citizen as Argus has, they do, nevertheless, capture a bargain that is struck between state and citizen – greater knowledge for greater responsibility. Here the state provides certain citizens with the tools to build resilience and in return it expects them to play a more active role in doing this in their own particular environment. In return these citizens provide the state with additional, specific knowledge about their particular environment, its characteristics and vulnerabilities for example, and expect the state to take responsibility for ensuring that they adapt their behaviour appropriately. This bargain is not new of course, yet it reminds us that while the general public have a role to play in enhancing coastal security, it is a role that must be effectively scrutinised and a role which, when studied, can help us to better understand maritime security governance as a whole.

To learn more about the CTPSR's work on port and coastal security please contact Dr Malcolm at james.malcolm@coventry.ac.uk.