

The Work of Costa Rica's Many Decisions for Peace

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In his 2005 acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in economics, Thomas Schelling lectured on what he called the “astonishing sixty years: the legacy of Hiroshima” (Schelling 2006). The point he made was how remarkable it was that after the nuclear bombing of Japan at the end of World War II, “we have enjoyed sixty years without nuclear weapons exploded in anger” (247). This happened, he argued, because of a growing understanding that nuclear weapons were fundamentally different than conventional weapons and that they should not be used. The process of creating this norm reflects why he was awarded the prize, for his varied work on explaining how individual decisions made in specific contexts can create new contexts in which others make decisions.

This cycle of reinforcing decisions is exactly the process that another Nobel laureate (in peace, this time), Oscar Arias, alluded to in his acceptance speech, where he argued:

Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions by many people in many countries. It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of solving problems and resolving conflicts. It cannot be forced on the smallest nation or enforced by the largest. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests. It requires us to work and live together. (1987)

The shared key insight of these two laureates is that peace can happen when individuals make specific decisions for a more peaceful outcome of the choices presented to them and that these choices influence future decision makers just as they were influenced by previous decision makers. The more these leaders repeatedly opt for peace, the easier it becomes.

This article will chronologically investigate the decisions made by leaders in Costa Rica for a more peaceful outcome to existing problems that in other similar situations historically involved violence. While external forces also played a role, key leaders in its history made decisions encouraging Costa Rica's development into a peace-promoting stable democratic country. Cataloging those events from the abolition of the military in 1948 through the peace accords of 1987 (that were recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize committee) indicates how this peace building process really was “the work of many decisions by many people.” The article will conclude with a brief comparison with Panama (which abolished its military in 1991 but has

not become a peace-advocating country like Costa Rica) to show how choices for militarized solutions can erode previous choices for peace.

The chronological storytelling of leaders' decisions as the methodology is used in this analysis of why Costa Rica became a beacon of peace in the region because structural explanations of the behavior do not account for the differences between it and its neighbors. The reason that Costa Rica gradually became more anti-militarist is because of the decisions of its leaders. Those decisions established the realm of what was acceptable for future leaders. This path dependent approach to explaining Costa Rica's history illustrates the utility of the theory and supports larger constructivist ideas. When Pouliot outlines a research methodology for a constructivist analysis, he argues that we must first look at the subjective meaning of what we are studying in the context of the actors at the time (2007). We can then look objectively at that element and then see how it's meaning evolves over time through a changing historical context. This socially constructed narrative of change is similar to the stories of revolution and resistance that Selbin discusses in his work (2010). Historical sociology is another field that utilizes this same path-dependency approach. As Kim summarizes, "there are six aspects of path dependence" that scholars agree are important (though disagree on the relative weight of each): "1) The past affects the future; 2) Initial conditions are causally important; 3) Contingent events are causally important; 4) Historical lock-in occurs; 5) A self-producing sequence occurs; and 6) A reactive sequence occurs" (2014). Applying this to Costa Rica, the context of the initial abolition of the military is important in shaping why it does not have a military today, but so are the many decisions made between then and now. These decisions have produced a snowballing effect where it becomes increasingly difficult to go back to militarization, the lock-in effect. As Rast notes, the key then in this kind of analysis is to make the connection between initial actions and the eventual outcomes as well as explaining how lock-in occurred (2012). This analysis then will analyze the context in which initial decisions were made, how those decisions affected subsequent decisions so that lock-in occurred where militarization was no longer perceived as an option for Costa Rican leaders.

Before detailing the many decisions made by Costa Ricans for peace, it is worthwhile to define what is meant by peace. As the various situations are presented, we will be interested in identifying those choices that are most likely to avoid militarized conflict. In this sense, we use a minimalist definition of peace – the absence of war or the avoidance of war. Throughout, as the many leaders of Costa Rica have done, we will be interested in which choices led to more peace rather than an ultimate notion of peace (also reflected in Arias's acceptance speech above). In this analysis, it is also useful to define militarization, which so many of the leaders sought to avoid. Militarization is the process of supporting the idea that arms are a useful way of providing security and solving conflicts. Throughout most of Costa Rica's history, leaders sought to avoid militarization because they sought peace. These leaders saw that even short term steps toward armed security would have the long term negative effect of threatening their peaceful and stable government. Thus, in the context of the choices made throughout their history, peace and anti-militarization were functionally the same thing.

Elimination of the Military

On December 1, 1948 after a short bloody civil war, the ruling junta in Costa Rica declared that the military would be abolished, handing over keys of the military barracks to the new minister of culture so that a museum - and not soldiers - would occupy the center of San Jose. The initial act of abolishing the military was not as remarkable as it seems in hindsight when we consider the options available to Jose Figueres, the leader of the opposition forces, and the context of his decision, all of which point toward demilitarization. It should be noted that Figueres was not what anyone would consider a pacifist. Aside from the fact that he raised his own army to overthrow the government, he also was part of the Caribbean Legion, whose purpose was the armed overthrow of all dictatorial governments in the region. After winning the civil war, he was told he should retire because he did not have widespread political support and that his rebel army should turn in its arms. His response was to dare “anyone who had the nerve to come and take the weapons” (Adams 1991, 228). Figueres was, however, very pragmatic and initially, all he did was abolish the military and create a Civil Guard with 1,500 soldiers, many of whom fought for him during the civil war.

The choice that Figueres faced initially was what to do with Costa Rica’s existing military. Even by Central American standards of the time, it was very small (about 300 soldiers) and quickly lost the civil war (Bird 1984). Because of this and Costa Rica’s historical insularity, the country did not pose a threat to any of its neighbors or anyone else and was not likely to be able to directly repel a foreign aggressor (and the only likely aggressor would be the United States, as it had established hemispheric hegemony). In a 1966 letter, Figueres argued that “The army of Costa Rica was abolished in 1948 in order to reaffirm the principle of civil government. We are convinced that countries such as ours do not need any armed forces other than a good police force” (in Bird 1984, 99). Figueres, having just fought and won a civil war with the military, did not want to lead the old military and most of his volunteer forces were not professional soldiers, nor did they want to be. Even if they did, Figueres clearly disliked much about the military, avoiding military titles for himself and demanding that his was a citizens’ movement (102). As others pointed out after the fact, abolishing the military was the one way to ensure that there was no counter-coup led by the military (as was very common in Central America at the time) (*ibid.*). Not having a military also freed up money to spend on social reforms that he sought to implement. Finally, there was a new alternative to funding a military to provide for security that Figueres could rely upon: the Organization of American States.

In 1947, representatives of the sovereign states of the Americas signed the Rio Pact, formalizing the creation of the Organization of American States. “As the Pact was applicable in cases of aggression emanating from within or without the Americas, and aggression short of an armed attack, as well as any other situation which ‘might endanger the peace of the Americas’, it would, theoretically at least, cover nearly every conceivable threat to Costa Rica’s security” (Bird 1984, 101). As US Ambassador to Costa Rica, Woodward said, “Costa Rica simply decided to take all these defensive agreements at their word” (in Bird 101). Given the power

dynamics of the international system at the time, it is easy to see why Figueres would assume that the leadership of the United States in the OAS was sufficient to ensure the country's security from foreign attacks.

First Year of the New Republic

Figueres' decision to abolish the military was tested within nine days, as the Nicaraguan General Anastasio Somoza Garcia, fearing that Costa Rica would launch an attack and overthrow the Nicaraguan government (as Figueres had sworn to do, by joining the Caribbean Legion), sought to reinstate the old regime in Costa Rica by invading on December 10, 1948. There were three clear options that Figueres had, as head of the ruling junta. He could recall his militia in a concerted effort, repeal the ban on the military, or apply to the infant Organization of American States to conduct a fact finding mission and propose a remedy. He chose the latter, though it should be noted that the initial invasion was met by opposition from locals in a spontaneously formed local militia.

On December 10, about 800 men attacked La Cruz, a small town in the north-west corner of Costa Rica. It is assumed that only about 200 were Costa Rican exiles who supported and were led by ousted former president Calderon, and that the rest were Nicaraguan (Bird 1984, 110). The next day, the Costa Rican ambassador to the U.S. delivered a letter to the Chairman of the OAS stating that Costa Rica had been attacked, invoking the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. The following day, the Council of OAS met to hear Costa Rica's claim that Nicaragua was "tolerating, encouraging and aiding a conspiracy concocted in Nicaragua in order to overthrow the Costa Rican government by force of arms and making available the territory and material means to cross the border and invade Costa Rica" (Bird 1984, 110). The OAS held a special meeting on the 14th of December and decided to "convoke a consultative meeting of Foreign Ministers to study the situation" (114).

Meanwhile, in Costa Rica, events occurred that may have relegated the ending of the military to an historical footnote. Communication censorship was imposed to deal with rumors about the invasion and public events like a football game were canceled in San Jose. Despite that, "about 600 men, chiefly members of the Caribbean Legion" began assembling in the former military barracks (that had been turned into a museum just thirteen days earlier) to join a resistance force (Bird 1984, 111). In the heat of the attack and public outrage, a "special office under the title of General Treasury of the Army was opened by the Minister of Public Works for the receipt of contributions for the National Army" despite the fact that the leader of the ruling junta had just disbanded the military (114). There are clear indications that many were open to resolving the issue with military force, though the short period of time, crisis situation, and relative newness of the government meant that there were many conflicting signals sent. In this context, for five days, the OAS sent the commission to interview captured Nicaraguans and Guardia supporters, Costa Rican leaders of the spontaneous military defense of Liberia, the candidate (Ulate) who won the election but was not allowed to take office that initially caused the civil war, the Nicaraguan President, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister for War, and Costa

Rican exiles in Nicaragua (including ex-President Teodoro Picado). On December 24, the OAS delivered their report, concluding that “the revolutionary movement was organized and prepared in Nicaragua and that the Nicaraguan Government had failed to take adequate measures to prevent the frontier being crossed” (115). The report further stated that after December 10th, Nicaraguan support for the rebels declined and thus seriously hampered their ability to continue the conflict.

As a result, both countries signed an agreement to end hostilities on December 24 and eventually approved a Pact of Amity on February 21, 1949. The Pact ended hostilities and went on to solemnly “reaffirm their desire to maintain the closest friendship and to strengthen the fraternal bonds which have historically characterized their relations; and wishing to avail themselves of the offer made to them by the Council of the Organization of American States, acting as a Provisional Organ of Consultation, of its good offices in attaining this objective” (Pact of Amity 1949). Despite the commitment to the closest friendship, while Figueres was in power, the relationship with Nicaragua was tense. However, within fifteen days of invading, the OAS condemned Nicaragua’s illegal invasion of Costa Rica and demanded they return their forces to pre-existing borders, which they did. In short, the OAS decision was an effective remedy for the situation.

Figueres chose the diplomatic solution rather than recreating the military for a variety of reasons. First and most importantly, the speed with which things happened made the possibility of remilitarization unlikely. There were spontaneous defensive militias, but they were not in control of, or even in contact with the ruling junta. Some of this is due to the geography and state of development at the time, but it was also due to the fact that the government had just been replaced and institutionalized rule had not been established. Further, all of the reasons for why Figueres disbanded the military in the first place were still in effect, given that it was only a few days later. Figueres turned to establishing a new constitution and internal reforms, but had set an important precedent. He had disbanded the military and then successfully negotiated a non-militarized defense against an invading neighbor.

As the conflict with Nicaragua was resolved, another threat to Figueres’ junta emerged internally. As feared, two military leaders sought to influence the political situation through a coup. The Minister of Public Safety, Édgar Cardona, joined with Fernando Figueroa, who had been passed over as the Director of Police. Cardona led an armed group that captured the artillery barracks and Figueroa seized control of the Bella Vista Fortress on April 2, 1949. Fortunately for Figueres, the two conspirators’ demands contradicted each other: one sought the immediate installment of Ulate and the other demanded Ulate resign. In this chaos, the remaining soldiers stayed loyal to Figueres’ junta and he led them to seal off San Jose, surround the capital and after a mortar attack on the fortress, forced the surrender of the coup plotters. Figueres only dismissed Cardona, despite popular pressure to execute him (Bird 1984, 120). In the aftermath of the coup, Figueres accelerated the disbanding of the army, relying on an increasingly well trained police force. Bird notes that there was another coup plot that involved a “large cache of submachine guns” and “220 communists were arrested” in mid-1948 (*Ibid.*).

Both of these events indicate the likelihood of internal dissent that has often been met with military repression in other contexts. Both of these cases, however, also suggest why Figueres chose not to revitalize the military. It was from within the ranks of the military that these threats emerged. Thus, he had an incentive to demilitarize and turn security matters over to police forces. The connotation of that type of security force was completely different from the mindset of a military force.

Over the following months, Figueres orchestrated the drafting and ratification of a new constitution, which codified the abolition of the military. Article 12 of the 1949 Constitution states:

The Army as a permanent institution is abolished. There shall be the necessary police forces for surveillance and the preservation of public order. Military forces may only be organized under a continental agreement or for the national defense; in either case, they shall always be subordinate to the civil power: they may not deliberate or make statements or representations individually or collectively.

As Bird's history of Costa Rica argues, the newly elected president (Ulate) and subsequent presidents are given some discretion in interpreting this clause. Ulate "might have interpreted the phrase 'necessary police force' to include almost any sort of para-military force. Alternatively he had reason to declare 'national emergency' – especially having regard to the Nicaraguan situation – or he could simply have ensured the Civil Guard developed into the type of force which exists in Nicaragua and Panama by including the necessary funds in the annual budgets presented by the executive" (1984, 125). In addition to the tensions with Nicaragua, during Ulate's presidency there were two minor revolts in 1950 and 1951 within Costa Rica that police forces were able to contain (*Ibid.*). The point, Bird argues, is that Ulate did not remilitarize, rather he continued the trajectory of the path set out by Figueres. He continued to build schools and increase spending for education.

Speculation on the reasons for supporting this interpretation includes Ulate's commitment to stabilizing Costa Rica after its civil war and wanting the new constitution to be taken at face value. While Ulate shared many of Figueres' political ideas, he was not as radical in his involvement, even keeping a relatively low profile in the war that started when he was not allowed to become president after the fraudulent election. He also sought to calm tensions with Nicaragua, in part by sidelining Figueres' influence in the government.

Continuing De-Militarization

In 1953 Figueres won the next presidential election and Somoza (still dictating in Nicaragua) again feared an invasion and preempted it by invading Costa Rica in 1955. This time, the invasion included aerial bombardment of San Jose. Figueres again appealed to the OAS, and they found Nicaragua in the wrong. The process was almost identical to the 1949 invasion, as was the result, but the second successful non-militarized defense of the country reinforced the idea that military forces were not needed to provide for the security of Costa Rica. Upon taking office, Figueres sped up the pace of demilitarization. One of his first public acts was to announce "that he was reorganizing the Ministry of Public Security with the basic aim of

giving the Ministry an even greater civilian image” (Bird 1984, 126). For most of the rest of his term, Figueres worked to develop the Costa Rican economy and solidify and institutionalize the notion of an unarmed democracy.

Figueres’ term ended with his party’s defeat to the more conservative National Unification Party candidate, Marcio Echandi Jimenez. There were some expectations that Echandi might reverse some of the social reforms and open the door to remilitarization. Because his party had won few seats in the legislature, he was unable to implement plans to reduce governmental involvement in the economy, but he surprisingly championed the reduction of military spending as a way to promote Costa Rica on the international stage and to use it as a tool to encourage economic development. Echandi sought to continue the agricultural modernization process that would allow Costa Rica to export more commodities for foreign exchange and on increasingly better terms. Echandi quickly met with U.S. President Eisenhower to pressure the United Fruit Company to renegotiate the terms of payment for banana exports and appealed to the U.S. government for increased loans to encourage agricultural development outside of the banana plantations (Watkins nd).

Bird notes that “soon after the election he announced he would make the country the first in the world to govern itself without armaments. He said: ‘We will offer our arms to those who sold them to us, in exchange for ploughs and tractors.’” (1984, 129). This “arms for tractors” plan became a key point in elevating Costa Rica’s profile in the U.S. and internationally. He played with this theme in a speech where he outlined his plan to sell 2,000 small arms for 6 tractors. Echandi argued that the only arms needed by Costa Rica were for police forces. As he said, “In our small way we are making history by selling arms to the United States” (in Bird 1984, 130). Within the Organization of American States, he also sought to increase Costa Rica’s role as a diplomatic power because of its demilitarization. He proposed a resolution in the OAS that all Latin American states would pledge not to acquire atomic weapons of any type, and that no conventional weapons should be purchased from outside the Hemisphere. The proposal was rejected, but established Costa Rica as a leader in non-militarized solutions to regional issues. This was further affirmed when he made the choice to not attend meetings of the Inter-American Defense Board, the military cooperation arm of the OAS.

This international grandstanding also increased his popularity within Costa Rica and became the basis for further domestic reforms that he implemented. In May of 1960, he converted all Civil Guard barracks into police stations and later abolished the defense ministry. Later, reflecting on his role in continuing the demilitarization of Costa Rica, Echandi said, “A referee puts down his arms when making decisions, he does not raise his fists. Even super powers could dispense with arms; hunger is often the cause of conflicts and how much destitution could have been avoided if arms factories had been converted into peaceful uses” (in Bird, 1984, 131). This later reflection echoes the Costa Rican ideas about its role in the Americas as a model for demilitarization so that the costs of military equipment could be redirected toward economic development.

Echandi was faced with limited opportunities to do what he campaigned on, relatively conservative policies of reducing the role of government in the economy, because of his party's weakness within the legislature. The one area where Echandi could provide strength and leadership was in foreign policy and over the Civil Guard. Demilitarization fit into the ideological mindset of reducing the size and capacity of government. Thus, what had been Figueres' relatively liberal policies regarding the military, were recast in a conservative light in the Echandi presidency. This helped consolidate the image that all Costa Ricans supported a smaller or non-existent military, for different ideological reasons.

As civil wars began to erupt in other Central American countries, in 1969 President Diego Trejos was misquoted in a news report, referring to a meeting the President had had with the Defense Minister of Guatemala and their discussion about the arms race unleashed in Central America and the rest of the Continent, as saying "Costa Rica must now consider the need to set about forming a future army" (134-5). Trejos, who Bird argues, very quickly sensed the response from this statement would get in Costa Rica, corrected the report, arguing "in no way do I believe that an army should be formed in Costa Rica. What I said, and I repeat, is that the police system of the country should be reinforced and we should try to find judicial provisions within the international mechanisms in order to defend and protect the sovereignty and integrity of Costa Rica, in the face of an eventual arms race in Central America... I want to make it clear in the strongest terms, that I do not support the creation of an army in Costa Rica" (*Ibid.*). This demonstrates how pervasive Costa Rica's self-perception as an unarmed democracy had become in just twenty years.

Choosing Sides, part 1: The Nicaraguan Revolution

In the mid-1970s, conflict in neighboring Nicaragua threatened to pull Costa Rica into a broader war that could reverse the demilitarization that had happened for the past 20 years. The Somoza regime continued to rule Nicaragua (though it was a different Somoza than the one who invaded in 1948 and 1955) and the Marxist Sandinista Liberation Front (Sandinistas) were gaining in popularity and in their ability to stage violent and spectacular attacks on the Nicaraguan *Guardia*. The English language Tico Times editorial from October 21, 1977 demonstrated the feelings of many Costa Ricans "Many Ticos were rooting this week for the Sandinistas – either loudly or quietly – because they share with them an intense dislike for the iron-fisted Somoza regime. They might not agree with the rebels' politics, but they agree wholeheartedly with their objective" (in Bird 1984, 136-7). This sentiment was reflected in President Daniel Oduber's administration. He rejected and actively fought communism, but he similarly opposed the dictatorial regime of the Somozas. Both, he argued, were anti-democratic and did not allow people their natural liberties. This meant that Costa Rica tried to remain neutral in the conflict, which opened up the possibility for Sandinistas fleeing the National Guard to retreat into Costa Rica, where it was not supposed to pursue. This also meant that the National Guard was increasingly likely to pursue Sandinistas across the border to try and kill them, effectively violating Costa Rica's sovereignty.

This situation came to a head on October 13, 1977. Nicaragua claimed that Sandinistas, who had been hiding in Costa Rica, attacked the Nicaraguan border town of San Carlos, killing several people, and then retreated back into Costa Rica. To investigate these claims, the Costa Rican Minister of Security Mario Charpentier held a press conference to announce that he would personally inspect the border (Bird 1984, 138). By drawing attention to the situation, he hoped to both discourage Sandinistas from seeking shelter and the *Guardia* from pursuing them. The Minister, along with twenty-five others (including fourteen journalists), boarded several boats to tour the San Juan River that divides the two countries in the east. While on patrol, they were attacked by an air strike (their boats are bombed) (Seligson and Carroll 1982, 333). As they fled to the banks of the river, they were pinned down by helicopter gunfire for an hour and a half. Eventually they were able to get through to the Nicaraguan military and the attack was called off (Bird 1984, 138). In summary, the Costa Rican Minister of Security along with other dignitaries and journalists were patrolling a border and then were attacked by the Nicaraguan military on Costa Rican soil.

The Costa Rican response was to appeal to the Organization of American States for an investigation. Again, diplomatic means were pursued instead of militarization. The end result of this incident, Bird argues, was that both sides were relatively pleased with the OAS resolution, “Costa Ricans were vindicated in their claim that their Minister and his party had been on the Costa Rican territory when they were attacked, and also the Nicaraguans had given assurances they would not encroach into Costa Rica when pursuing any rebel elements. Nicaragua’s delight was in securing the further assistance from the Costa Rican government that measures would be taken to prevent the rebel Sandinistas from organizing and preparing to invade Nicaragua whilst they were in Costa Rica” (140). The good feelings were short lived however as the Sandinistas increased their offensive and Costa Rica was forced to become more involved. President Oduber continued to grant asylum to Sandinistas who sought it, but at the same time increased the Civil Guard’s presence in the north and arrested armed guerrillas, most of whom were deported to Panama.

In light of this increasingly armed situation, Costa Rica was offered military support from a number of countries, including the U.S. Oduber continually declined the offers of military aid, arguing that remilitarization would violate his “country’s permanent struggle against militarism and for national and international peace” (in Bird 1984, 41). At a ceremony inaugurating a gymnasium the President stated, “Six gymnasiums like this cost a million dollars which is equivalent to the cost of the cheapest warplane of the type being purchased by the countries like ours in the Third World. It is more consistent with the Costa Rican tradition to build six gymnasiums than to buy a war plane for Costa Rica... The wheel of a war plane that has to be changed every three landings costs the same as a house in our housing program” (*Ibid.*).

An opportunity for a stronger stance against the Sandinistas arose with the election of conservative politician Rodrigo Carazo in 1978, just as the Sandinista offensive was increasing. As a presidential candidate, Carazo had taken a hard line on communism, pledging to withdraw Costa Rica’s ambassador to Moscow (Seligson and Carroll 1982, 333). However, upon taking

office, he softened his stance, allowed more Sandinista asylum seekers and continued the ambiguous neutrality of his predecessor. Tensions between Nicaragua and Costa Rica grew as more Sandinista attacks on border towns involved fighting between the National Guard and Sandinistas on both sides of the border. Carazo signaled his dissatisfaction with Somoza when Costa Rica expropriated Somoza's 15,000 acre personal estate in northern Costa Rica. Former president, Figueres' call for arms to be shipped to the Sandinistas further increased tension (334) and again indicated that Figueres was no pacifist. In December, Somoza closed the Nicaraguan border and threatened to invade Costa Rica if it did not expel the Sandinistas (335). Costa Rica responded by requesting OAS monitors and stepped up its efforts at patrolling the northern region and moving guerrillas to the south or Panama. It even increased the armed capability of the Civil Guard, but only went so far as to "borrow" weapons from Venezuela (Bird 1984, 146). It wanted to be sure that they were not purchased or owned by the Civil Guard, for fear that it would become more like an institutionalized military.

An editorial in the Tico Times on 20 September 1978 summarized popular opinion about the role that the government had played, walking the balance between opposing Somoza but not wanting a communist neighbor: "While there is no doubt that Ticos generally sympathize with the Sandinistas, Costa Rica has always done exactly what is required of it by international law: it rounds up the guerillas and ships them off to whatever country will accept them (as long as that country does not border Nicaragua). It does not harbor them or support them. Of course it doesn't shoot them on sight, either, and this irks Nicaragua greatly... As Costa Rica has pointed out, it's a lot easier for a country with a powerful and well-trained army to defend its border (and incidentally, to keep that army from invading its neighbor's territory and shooting at its neighbor's citizens) than it is for a country with no army at all to keep guerillas out of the wilderness near its border" (in Bird 1984, 143). Costa Rica continued to argue that it could not fully stop either the Sandinistas or the National Guard because it had no military, which allowed it to continue its preferred policy of not fully supporting either side.

Costa Rica's implicit support for the Sandinistas only became apparent when their victory became increasingly likely in Nicaragua. In February of 1979, President Carazo announced that Costa Rica would "not renew diplomatic relations with Nicaragua as long as General Anastasio Somoza" was in power (Bird 1984, 145). Then, as Seligson and Carroll argue, the Sandinistas were "allowed to set up a governmental Junta-in-Exile in San Jose. What normally would have been a diplomatically deplorable maneuver by Costa Rica, that of openly fomenting the downfall of a sitting government outside its own territory, now brought immediate recognition of the Junta by various nations, so low was the international public opinion of the Somoza regime" (336). This recognition was followed by immediate recognition of the Sandinistas when Somoza resigned in July of 1979.

The choice not to remilitarize to deal with the border skirmishes during the Nicaraguan revolution allowed Costa Rica to achieve several goals it sought during the 1970s, across several presidential administrations. First, it allowed continued funding for other programs, whether health and education or agricultural development. It also provided a way to walk the diplomatic

narrow ridge that reflected Costa Rica's preferred policy. While Costa Rica was consistently anti-communist and did not want a Marxist group to seize control of Nicaragua, it also was consistently opposed to the dictatorial reign of the Somoza regime. If it had a military capable of dealing with either threat, there would be much more pressure to utilize it, from the U.S., Nicaragua and other influential Central American countries. By not having a military, it could plausibly argue that it was not capable of stopping border incursions. It could also diplomatically call for the OAS to condemn Nicaraguan attacks on its sovereignty when the National Guard crossed its borders. If Costa Rica remilitarized, it would be forced to both deal with the Sandinistas and the National Guard. Thus, the choice not to rearm better allowed Costa Rica to achieve its foreign policy goals. This choice calculus continued as the revolution turned into the Contra War.

Choosing Sides, part 2: The Contra War

After the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua, forces loyal to Somoza and opposed to the spread of communism, primarily backed by the U.S. started an insurgency campaign to destabilize the new regime in hopes of ousting the Sandinistas. The dynamics of this conflict were very similar to the revolutionary struggle as were the pressures to support one side or the other. Similar to the revolutionary insurgency, Costa Rica took a muted neutral stance – they did not want a fully Marxist neighbor, but they also did not support the violent restoration of *Somocistas* (the Somoza regime without the actual Somoza family ruling). This time, however, U.S. pressure on Costa Rica was extremely intense.

To try and deflect this pressure, Costa Rican President Alberto Monge declared the country neutral in all conflicts. In the September 15, 1983 declaration, he stated:

We declare that Costa Rica will observe neutrality in all armed conflicts affecting the states of the international community, subject to the following:

Active

Our neutrality does not imply impartiality in ideological and political conflicts in the world...

Unarmed

Our declaration of neutrality will not require the reestablishment of the army as a permanent institution. The country's external security will be based on the collective security systems to which it belongs.

Permanent

Our neutrality does not refer to a particular conflict or a specific region of the world. Neither is it temporary. (in Gudmundson 1984).

In this way, Monge hoped to both avoid entanglement in the Nicaraguan conflict, but also to reaffirm Costa Rican values. The element about not being impartial to ideological and political conflicts in the world was a way to remain true to the pro-democracy (and thus anti-communism) stance that Costa Rica has consistently maintained in its foreign policy. This reaffirmed to the U.S. that they were partners in this fight, but that Costa Rica would not be an active combatant in any fight.

One of the primary tactics that the U.S. used to pressure Costa Rica's support of the Contras was to offer aid or threaten to withhold aid. In the first few years of the 1980s, Costa Rica received \$2 million a year from the U.S. in aid. As the Latin American debt crisis began to consume budgets with debt, Costa Rica, like most other countries in the region, was in dire need of foreign aid, and requested \$10 billion for 1984 (Gudmundson 1984, 19). The U.S. primarily wanted to give that aid in the form of military aid, which would require that Costa Rica spend the money on militarizing, something that Costa Rica did not want to do. For example, in January of 1984, 1,000 U.S. army engineers were sent to Costa Rica. Within the country, there were accusations that the administration was actively assisting the anti-Sandinista campaign. As a result, the government "first postponed and then refused" the aid but then "revived [the program] under the guise that the engineers from an army combat unit would construct roads in the south of the country and improve an airfield to enable planes diverted from San Jose in bad weather to land there instead of having to fly to Panama" (Bird 1984, 184). In this way, Costa Rica accepted the aid, but used it for non-military purposes that might help encourage economic development – in this case, tourism.

Later that same year, in an effort to seek economic assistance and political support for their neutrality, Monge toured twelve European countries. While on the trip, the U.S. announced that "Costa Rica was joining in US military maneuvers" (Bird 1984, 184). Monge flatly denied this. Later in the trip, another U.S. report suggested that "it was 'when' not 'how' Costa Rica was to be militarized... He replied this was part of a campaign carried on against Costa Rica over a period of two years, and repeatedly emphasized that his country would maintain its everlasting armed neutrality, saying: 'We are irrevocably opposed to war: our neutrality is unarmed neutrality as Costa Rica has no army and does not wish to have one. We are not a military power and have no wish to be one.'" (*Ibid.*). Thus, by the time of Contra War, Costa Rica had cemented its identity as an unarmed democracy that would not go back to funding and maintaining a military. This choice required new tactics to ensure that the country continued to receive foreign aid to support its economic development. By this time, the choice to not rearm had become fully institutionalized and moved out of the realm of easy choices. In this way, Costa Rica was able to cement the earlier many choices for nonviolent alternatives to militarization so that it no longer was an option. On this basis, Costa Rica was then able to become a diplomatic force for peace in regional conflicts.

Mediating Central American Wars: Advocating Diplomacy and Human Rights

Costa Rica also chose to move from self-identifying as an unarmed democracy to a peace promoting force for diplomacy in the region. Though, like the choices to demilitarize, this was also built on many smaller choices that favored active promotion of diplomacy over violence in the international system. Rather than also explain the context and decision structures for each of those choices, as they mirror the decision-making detailed above, it should be sufficient to note the accumulating ways in which Costa Rica became more involved in promoting human rights,

democracy and diplomacy in the international system, how this provided a platform for mediating the Central American Wars and how this advocacy continues today.

Costa Rica's foreign policy has consistently promoted international diplomacy and human rights as ways to resolve conflicts. It participated in the preparatory conference for the San Francisco meeting that founded the United Nations. Costa Rica was a founder of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the first country to sign the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In many ways, these documented Costa Rica's ethos of providing for democratic liberties but also providing for social and economic liberties as well by funding education, healthcare and economic development programs.

Costa Rica's role in establishing human rights on the international agenda has been unparalleled. Costa Rica's first ambassador to the U.N., Fernando Soto Harrison, served as vice-president of the founding Human Rights Commission. He had been involved in "the establishment of Costa Rica's Supreme Electoral Tribunal, a path-breaking domestic democratic institution [and he] worked closely with Eleanor Roosevelt to draft core procedures and documents of the human rights regime" (Brysk 2005, 448). As Brysk notes, the celebrated Costa Rican advocate for human rights, Fernando Volio Jimenez, was elected president of the UN Human Rights Commission and Costa Rica held a seat on the body for over 20 years throughout the last four decades of the 20th century, "an unusual span for a single small country" (*Ibid.*). Costa Rica helped establish the Inter-American Court of the Organization of American States. In 1969, Costa Rican president Trejos Fernandez hosted the conference that drafted the American Convention on Human Rights and Costa Rica was the first country to ratify the convention and the first to accept the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and subsequent Inter-American Court of Human Rights (449). In his 1978 inaugural address, Costa Rican president Rodrigo Carazo Odio offered Costa Rica as the site for a regional human rights court administered by the OAS (*Ibid.*). After several years of work, Costa Rica now hosts the court and was instrumental in getting the judges to serve in the initial institution. Beyond the court, Costa Rican judges saw the need for an institution that could actively research and promote human rights awareness and understanding and so, with support of key university law school professors, justice ministers and others, they crafted the idea of a new type of institution. In 1980, "Costa Rica signed an agreement with the OAS to host the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights" whose mission has expanded to "include election monitoring and substantial technical assistance to emerging democracies" (450). President Carazo also offered Costa Rica as a site for a proposed United Nations University for Peace, which the General Assembly passed in 1980.

Each of these actions in promoting international cooperation and the development of the protection of human rights contributed to the growing foundation of Costa Rica's foreign policy. They meshed perfectly with the choices that presidents were making during this time to not militarize and to rely on international organizations to provide for defense and security from foreign aggressors. That is, they actively sought to build the capacity and legitimacy of those

organizations that would most likely come to their defense and promote their values. It is in this context of international advocate for human rights and diplomacy combined with an internal revulsion toward militarization that Costa Rica became a leader in structuring plans for resolving the Central American wars that had raged for the past decade.

As presidential candidate Oscar Arias sought the presidency of Costa Rica, the Contra War in Nicaragua had spilled over into and inflamed conflicts in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala in addition to the border tensions with Costa Rica. These Central American wars became a key issue on which Arias campaigned and presented a choice for the Costa Rican electorate about how active their country should be in promoting a peace process, in part knowing that it would likely involve recognizing the status quo of a Sandinistan Nicaragua and that the U.S. was violently opposed to that reality. As Heubel points out in his review of that electoral campaign, Arias' views on a stable peace for the region and the "successful communication on that issue helped him win the battle for votes... the peace issue was the most effective of all the themes that Arias raised against his opponent" (1990, 310). Once in office, Arias quickly moved to encourage his Central American counterparts toward an agreement.

On February 15, 1987, Arias presented a plan to his Salvadoran, Honduran and Guatemalan counterparts. The plan "called for a national dialogue with domestic opposition, amnesties, cease-fires, democratization, free elections and renewals of arms reduction talks.... His idea was to get all four democracies to agree, and then approach Nicaragua" (Robinson 1988, 594). While they did not agree immediately, they agreed to continue meeting and to bring Nicaragua into the process. It is important to note how closely these key elements reflect the elements of Costa Rica's earlier stance on neutrality and its growing influence on recognizing human rights and diplomacy as a way to solve conflict. In many ways, Arias' peace plan was a reflection of Costa Rican values as they had become solidified over the past 30 years.

Arias played a key role in pushing the negotiations forward. "According to Costa Rican Ambassador Fernandez, a key factor was that the presidents met alone and stayed in the room until they reached agreement" (Robinson 1988, 599). By having the men together in one room, Arias could play on their sense of individual commitment to the future of their respective countries. This was a risky gamble, as the leaders of the countries were well aware of the support each had given to insurgencies in the others' countries. A "key moment followed an angry exchanged between [El Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon] Duarte and [Nicaraguan President Daniel] Ortega, in which they traded accusations of aiding each other's insurgencies; Duarte asked Ortega three times if he would keep his word. With the other presidents as witnesses the two shook hands. The Guatemalan president, Vinicio Cerezo, was from the beginning more amenable to signing. Thus Duarte's decision was probably the turning point. That left Honduran President Jose Azcona to incur sole blame if he refused to sign; the four-to-one lineup was too much for him" (*Ibid.*). This element of not wanting to be responsible for the collapse of a peace process proved to be an important motivating factor in its eventual success.

On August 7, the presidents signed onto the agreement and there was much speculation that each one thought the others would not be able to live up to the accord, which made it easier

for them to sign the agreement (Robinson 1988). However, each also did not want to be the one responsible for the breakdown of the peace agreement, thinking another would likely take the blame when it failed. This thinking also shaped the U.S. response. The U.S. did not agree with the outcome that recognized the Sandinista government and said nothing about Soviet aid to the Sandinistas, however, it did not want to oppose a peace agreement that all of the parties had signed.

As Robinson summarizes,

The August 7 accord called for signatory governments to hold talks with unarmed opposition groups, to issue amnesties, to form national reconciliation commissions including opposition and church representatives, to ‘take all the necessary actions in order to achieve an effective cease-fire,’ for democratization (including complete freedom for television, radio and the press; full lifting of states of emergency and the guarantee of constitutional liberties), for free elections according to established constitutional timetables and elections in 1988 to a new Central American parliament. The accord requested all governments to cease open or covert military, logistical and financial aid to insurgent groups; and all the signatories were to deny use of their territory to insurgents. (1988, 600)

In short, the signatories to the accord agreed to move away from militarization and toward democracy and diplomacy. The accord embodied the fruits of Costa Rica’s long slow march toward a peaceful state.

Costa Rica has not rested on its pacifist laurels, but rather has continued to be an international force for diplomacy and human rights promotion. In 1993 Costa Rica hosted “the Latin American regional preparatory conference for the Vienna World Human Rights Conference” where it cemented a decades-long push for a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which became a reality at that Vienna conference in 1995. In 2001 Costa Rica proposed three important initiatives in the UN Human Rights Commission: “a global campaign of human rights education, an Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, and an improved system of information gathering by UN bodies for country reports on human rights” (Byrsk 2005, 448). The Convention Against Torture became a reality in 2002. That year, on December 10, Costa Rica also declared itself the first country in the Western Hemisphere to be free from anti-personnel landmines (Perales and Case 2003).

Within the Organization of American States, Costa Rica continued to play a leading role in promoting rights. It sponsored resolutions for an additional protocol on social and economic rights to be added to the American Convention, an inter-American declaration on the rights of prisoners, a resolution on the rights of migrants, and the 1999 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Byrsk 2005, 451). For over five years, Costa Rican officials worked on crafting an inter-American disability rights convention through the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, and in 1999, the convention was passed. “And of course, Costa Rica was the first member state to sign it” (*Ibid.*).

Following the Costa Rican Model?

The choice to disband a military is rare. The Costa Rican choice to continue to move away from militarization is even more so. The relatively recent abolition of the Panamanian military provides an interesting case that is not developed enough to determine whether Panama is following Costa Rica's model.

In 1989 the United States invaded Panama to remove Manuel Noriega from office. The following several years involved reconstruction of the political system. In February of 1990, the new government abolished the Panamanian military and moved many of the soldiers into the newly created Panamanian Public Forces, an organization with a police and security mission (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2005). In 1994, a constitutional amendment outlawed a standing army. In Article 310, the Constitution states, "The Republic of Panama shall not have an Army. All Panamanians are required to take arms to defend the national independence and the territorial integrity of the State." It goes on to say that there will be a police force to ensure that laws and safety are maintained and then states, "In the face of external aggression and by authority of the Law, special police services may be organized temporarily for the protection of the frontiers and jurisdictional spaces of the Republic." Like the Costa Rican Constitution, this allows room for expansion and thus a pacifist country is not created through the constitution, but will depend on the continued choice to move the country toward demilitarization. The fact that the initial abolition of the military was done by one party and the constitutional amendment process was led by an opposition party indicates wider support for this movement.

Since the abolition of the military, there have been some opportunities to remilitarize and to take a stronger stance to actively not militarize the situation. In a brief reading of Panama's recent history, it appears that neither of these have happened. The transfer of the Panama Canal to Panamanian ownership, the continuing drug war throughout Latin America, and the post-9/11 global war on terror each provided an opportunity to remilitarize Panama, with significant support or pressure from the U.S. to do so. However, it is not clear that Panama has significantly remilitarized but it also does not appear that each of these opportunities were taken to clearly say no to military aid and increased military spending. That is, even if Panama has not remilitarized it also has not appeared to publicly move in the opposite direction, as Costa Rican presidents did. This could be because not enough time has passed, not enough leadership away from militarization exists, or the concept is not one that is popular. Regardless, the importance of multiple decisions against militarization when the opportunity was presented over time by multiple people, as the case of Costa Rica demonstrates, is required for locking-in a commitment to peace.

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