

## Chapter 5 – Defence from self harm

The international system and networks of alliances may prove useful in providing defence from external threats but they are of little use to protect a state from itself. Civil wars, insurgencies and coups d'état have been common features of the post-Second World War order<sup>118</sup>. Since the Second World War and the beginning of the current UN-dominated era many militaries have only used force on their own citizens rather than in self-defence against an external aggressor. In many countries military forces have been more geared towards internal threats and regime protection than towards defence from an external aggressor<sup>119</sup>. Where militaries become focused on politics and internal affairs it can become something that the people and the state itself need to be defended against rather than being the means of defence. In recognition of this fact a number of countries have taken the revolutionary step of disbanding their militaries following civil wars or military regimes and have pursued the non-military path.

### *Costa Rica*

Perhaps the most famous country without armed forces is the Central American republic of Costa Rica. Everything about Costa Rica's geography and strategic circumstance suggests that a military may be useful in defending its territory and national interests. It maintains two coastlines on the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean and it shares land borders with Nicaragua and Panama, both of whom have suffered from civil war or invasion. It occupies territory that is a vector for international narcotics smuggling on a scale as to threaten the national security of a small state<sup>120</sup>. Indeed this trade has impacted the national security of much larger nearby states such as Colombia and Mexico where a military response has been required to combat that threat. Costa Rica is not a part of any regional collective security arrangement or alliance with a larger power, it is entirely dependent on its own capabilities for its own defence. Despite all of these factors Costa Rica refuses to develop a military and instead relies on a national police force called *Fuerza Publica* or Public Force to provide police, border security and coastguard functions under a civilian Commissioner of Police<sup>121</sup>. The reasons for this lie in Costa Rica's past.

Costa Rica like most Central American countries is a former Spanish colony that was part of

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<sup>118</sup> Paul D. Williams, **War**, in Paul D. Williams (ed.), *Security Studies: An Introduction*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 194-195.

<sup>119</sup> Caitlin Talmadge, **Different Threats, Different Militaries: Explaining Organizational Practices in Authoritarian Armies**, *Security Studies*, (Vol.25:1, 2016), 113.

<sup>120</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 206-210.

<sup>121</sup> IISS, 392.