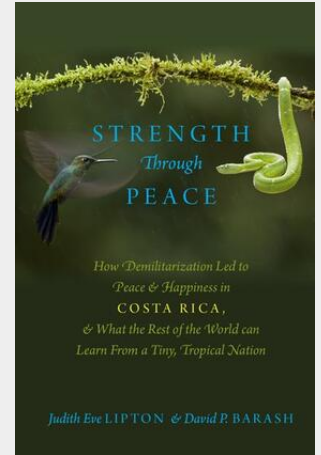


Strength Through Peace

How Demilitarization Led to Peace and Happiness in Costa Rica, and What the Rest of the World Can Learn from a Tiny, Tropical Nation

Costa Rica is the only full-fledged and totally independent country to be entirely demilitarized. Its military was abolished in 1948, with the keys to the armory handed to the Department of Education. Socially, Costa Rica is a success story. Although 94th in the world for GDP, it is in the top 10 on various measurements of health and well-being. Citizens enjoy high standards of living that include universal access to healthcare, education, and pensions. In addition, the country practices sustainable resource management, such as reforestation and the development of solar and wind power, and it expects to be carbon neutral by 2020. Hunting is illegal. 25% of the landmass is parks and reserves. The government supports universal health care, especially maternal and child health. Costa Rica even has a Blue Zone, an area where people live extraordinarily long, healthy lives. To some extent, Costa Rica is simply lucky: it was largely inaccessible, and it had virtually no precious minerals, therefore it was mostly spared the ravages of predatory colonialism. The Costa Rican people made very good social decisions, ranging from an avowed commitment to social democracy at the national level, to local land distribution to develop stable middle class farmers. But Costa Rica's neighbors have not enjoyed nearly as much peace and prosperity. It is unlikely that Costa Rica's demilitarization and its remarkable social success are coincidental; clearly, something special is going on. Through good luck, good leadership, and good decisions, Costa Rica has become arguably the sanest and most progressive country on earth. This book examines how and why Costa Rica is safe and independent without any military at all, and what the rest of us can learn from its success.



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