A MILITARY HISTORY OF MODERN SPAIN
Praeger Security International Advisory Board

Board Cochairs

Loch K. Johnson, Regents Professor of Public and International Affairs, School of Public and International Affairs, University of Georgia (U.S.A.)

Paul Wilkinson, Professor of International Relations and Chairman of the Advisory Board, Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, University of St. Andrews (U.K.)

Members

Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies (U.S.A.)

Thérèse Delpech, Director of Strategic Affairs, Atomic Energy Commission, and Senior Research Fellow, CERI (Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques), Paris (France)

Sir Michael Howard, former Chichele Professor of the History of War and Regis Professor of Modern History, Oxford University, and Robert A. Lovett Professor of Military and Naval History, Yale University (U.K.)

Lieutenant General Claudia J. Kennedy, USA (Ret.), former Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army (U.S.A.)

Paul M. Kennedy, J. Richardson Dilworth Professor of History and Director, International Security Studies, Yale University (U.S.A.)

Robert J. O’Neill, former Chichele Professor of the History of War, All Souls College, Oxford University (Australia)

Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland (U.S.A.)

Fareed Zakaria, Editor, Newsweek International (U.S.A.)
Contents

Foreword by Stanley G. Payne vii

Introduction by Wayne H. Bowen and José E. Alvarez 1

1. The Spanish Army at War in the Nineteenth Century: Counterinsurgency at Home and Abroad Geoffrey Jensen 15

2. From Empire to Republic: The Spanish Army, 1898–1931 José E. Alvarez 37

3. World War I: Unarmed Neutrality Javier Ponce 53

4. Spanish Civil War: Franco’s Nationalist Army George Esenwein 68

5. The Popular Army of the Spanish Republic, 1936–39 Michael Alpert 93

6. The Spanish Military During World War II Wayne H. Bowen 110

7. Decolonization and the Spanish Army, 1940–76 Shannon E. Fleming 122

8. Rejoining Europe: From Isolation to Integration, 1945–2006 Kenneth W. Estes and José M. Serrano 136

9. War on Terrorism: The Spanish Experience, 1939–2006 José A. Olmeda 161

Notes 179

Bibliography 201

Index 213

About the Contributors 221
In no other country is the historical importance of the military greater than in the case of Spain, for it is the only Western country founded by eight centuries of intermittent but continuing warfare against another civilization. Geography is destiny, as the saying goes, and this is absolutely the case with Spain, whose position as the southwestern frontier of Europe has determined much of her history and her military affairs. Thus, one American historian termed medieval Spain “a society organized for war” to a greater extent than other Western lands. Once the united monarchy of Spain metamorphosed into the government of the first world empire, military action remained of prime importance, both to maintain the integrity of the European crownlands and to sustain the struggle against a powerful and aggressive Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean and in north Africa. It is scant exaggeration to say that the expense of the military burden bankrupted the state and helped to precipitate a disastrous economic decline. During the last imperial century—the eighteenth—this burden was reduced yet remained significant.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spain for the first time ceased to be a military power—something that a lagging economy could not possibly afford—yet the military remained important, and during this period played a significant role in political affairs as well. Though the country had fallen from the ranks of the major powers, the combination of foreign invasion, complications of imperial decline, remarkably severe internal conflict, and continuing hostilities on the Moroccan frontier created a situation in which what had become a second-rank army and navy spent more years engaged in warfare during the nineteenth century than was the case with any other country. Protracted involvement in international, colonial, and civil wars proved a heavy burden once more for both the state and the economy, and was undoubtedly a major factor in the country’s lagging economic growth during that era.

Spain entered the era of liberal and parliamentary politics in 1810, earlier than most countries, yet the weakness and division of the new political forces quickly summoned the military as political arbiter, especially during the chaotic “era of pronunciamientos” between 1820 and 1875. A “praetorian” role for the military returned again during the dictatorship
of 1923–30 and then during the civil war of 1936–39 and the long Franco regime that followed. A praetorian military was nonetheless rarely “militarist”—that is, given to the hypertrophy of the military for purposes of war—at any time during this era, as Spain remained apart from the European alliance systems and neutral during both world wars.

The result was to produce a singular Spanish military history in modern times, the subject of this book. Between 1810 and 1944 Spanish forces were frequently active on a variety of fronts, yet rarely engaged in full and direct international warfare. In no other European land did the army play such an important role in political affairs, and yet there was never a completely clear-cut military dictatorship until 1936. Throughout this period the military remained weak as a fighting force, significantly under-budgeted, disproportionate resources being devoted to paying the normally meager salaries of a very bloated officer corps. The final paradox was that it was the Franco regime that largely disciplined the military and removed them from political life, finally reducing the military budget to less than the amount devoted to education for the first time in Spanish history.

Both the size and the influence of the military have been reduced even more under the democratic governments that have ruled since 1978, so that it is possible to define the main modern era of the Spanish military as lasting from the beginning of the French invasion in 1808 to the abortive pronunciamiento of 1981. The contemporary period is characterized by the incredibly shrinking Spanish military, which receive even less attention than in most other European countries, so that at the time this is written the government would be hard-pressed to place more than 70,000 troops in combat. For the first time since the eighth century it would be unable to defend its own southern frontier.

The present volume presents a succinct but comprehensive account of this singular modern military history. It makes available to a broad audience a clear, objective treatment that will be useful not merely to students of Spanish history but also to those interested in the broader study of modern Europe and of comparative military affairs.

Stanley G. Payne
Spain’s modern military history is one of the lessons learned and then quickly forgotten. The nation’s army remained mostly stagnant and unresponsive to new tactics and doctrines even though it was called upon to fight wars both at home and abroad. It is also the history of an organization that in the early nineteenth century served as an instrument for liberal reform and progress, then by the end of the century, and into the twentieth century, became a vehicle for political conservatism and reactionary politics. In its nine chapters, this book takes a critical and analytical look at the Spanish military from the Napoleonic invasion in 1808 to the ongoing war on terror.

In “The Spanish Army at War in the Nineteenth Century,” Geoffrey Jensen astutely details how the Spanish military responded to Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1808, known in Spain as the War of Independence (1808–14), as well as to the postbellum period. During the Napoleonic War, the Spanish Army performed poorly. Even though in some cases units adopted modern military tactics, such as changing from linear formations to a combination of lines and attack columns, the army as a whole failed to realize the importance of combined arms, effectively employing artillery and cavalry, to support the infantry. With the exception of their victory over the French at Bailén in 1808, the Army was unable to repeat this triumph for the remainder of the war. It would be the combination of Spanish guerrilla fighters and the Duke of Wellington’s British regulars that would drive the French invaders from Spain. In Spanish history, the guerrilla fighter attained near mythical status in harassing and tying down thousands of Napoleon’s soldiers in a vicious war, particularly in the northern half of the country.

Jensen continues his essay describing the role of the Spanish Army during the period of civil wars. The three Carlist Wars (1833–40, 1846–49, and 1872–76), fought between the followers of Don Carlos and the government forces of Queen Isabel II (Cristinos), again showed the poor fighting capability of the Spanish Army. This time, as Jensen notes, the
Carlist guerrillas were the opponents of the central government. While the military had tried to institute reforms after the Napoleonic War, by establishing military academies and training manuals for recruits, one area of military science that was overlooked was mountain warfare. It would be in the mountainous regions of Navarre and the Basque Country that the Carlists would have their strongest base of support. The use of irregular warfare by the Carlists would prove difficult and costly for the liberal army to overcome. It is interesting to note that despite having fought and defeated the Carlists, the Army ignored the lessons learned in fighting an insurgency campaign in favor of emphasizing conventional war in its doctrine. In addition, the cumulative effect of the Carlist Wars and military coups (*pronunciamientos*) was the politicization of the officer corps, resulting in a tremendously deleterious practice within the ranks of the officer corps: rewarding loyalty to the government by awarding promotions. This had the effect of creating a bloated and top-heavy officer corps that would plague Spain well into the twentieth century.

In the international arena, the Spanish Army, under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, General Leopoldo O’Donnell, became involved in a short war against the Berbers in Morocco in 1859–60. When local tribesmen attacked the Spanish *presidio* of Ceuta, Spain responded by declaring war. Although the war brought Spain control of the Moroccan cities of Tetuán and Tangiers, it had been at the cost of thousands of lives, the great majority to cholera. The military had also clearly demonstrated that it was still disorganized and had gained little from the Carlist Wars. Nevertheless, the Army did learn a few lessons from the Moroccan campaign such as using skirmishers to counteract indigenous guerrillas and employing flanking attacks to surround the enemy.

Lastly, Jensen recounts the actions of the Spanish Army in its two wars against Cuban insurgents seeking independence. In the Ten Years’ War (1868–78), the military was able to defeat the *independentistas* and impose a peace treaty, the Pact of Zanjón. This first campaign in Cuba was greatly overshadowed by the much more important Cuban War of Independence (1895–98) which gave Cuba (as well as Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam) its independence from Spain. The commanding Spanish general, Arsenio Martínez Campos, who had been successful in winning the Ten Years’ War, did not meet the same success in 1895–96. A combination of poor training, tropical diseases, and highly motivated Cuban insurgents had led to Spanish setbacks in the campaign. Unable to adapt to and counter the guerrilla tactics of the Cuban rebels, Martínez Campos was recalled and replaced by General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau in 1896.

Weyler’s arrival in Cuba and his counterinsurgency tactics in Cuba began to turn the tide of the war in favor of the government. His introduction of “reconcentration” was a way of separating the guerrillas from the local peasantry by forcing the civilian population into camps,
thus severing the lifeline between the two groups. Reconcentration led to the deaths of thousands of Cubans due to disease and starvation, but it was an effective military strategy. Negative international newspaper publicity, especially in the United States, and serious political pressure in Spain led to the removal of Weyler in 1897. Less known about Weyler, and Jensen notes this in his chapter, is the creation of a very effective counterinsurgency unit known as the *Cazadores de Valmaseda*. An elite, multinational, light infantry unit, the *Cazadores de Valmaseda* was able to move rapidly and fight the style of war their enemies would choose. In the end, the involvement of the United States in 1898 ended Spain’s overseas empire in the Caribbean and in the Pacific. The “Disaster” of 1898 would shake Spain and its military to the very core and produce tremendous consequences for the twentieth century.

The deplorable state of the Spanish military is covered comprehensively in José E. Alvarez’s “From Empire to Republic: The Spanish Army, 1898–1931.” It is the story of an army trying to cope with the loss of its overseas empire (*ultra mar*) to the newly emerging United States of America, while at the same time trying to preserve what little remained of its pride and dignity. With its Navy having been destroyed in Manila Bay and Santiago de Cuba, Spain’s possibility for overseas operations was terminated and future naval careers were dashed, a good example being that of Francisco Franco. The best the Army could do now was to focus on Morocco and Equatorial Guinea for any semblance of an overseas empire. Moreover, the Army had to reinvent itself as the defender of the fatherland from internal enemies such as Catalan separatism and working-class political movements such as anarchism, socialism, and communism. It had to emerge from the ignominious defeat of 1898 and make itself relevant to the nation. However, the Army was in a calamitous state burdened by too many senior officers, promotions based on seniority, poor pay for junior officers, inadequate training, and obsolete equipment. To make matters worse, the Army was also internally divided by branches of service: those that required technical training, such as artillery, engineers, and medical personnel, who perceived themselves as being superior to the combat branches of infantry and cavalry, who saw the greatest amount of combat. This sentiment would later lead to the creation of *Juntas de Defensa*, basically military unions for each branch of service. Another internal stress was the division between those who served in Spain (*peninsulares*) and those who served in Morocco (*Africanistas*). For those who sought a military career of adventure and rapid promotions, Morocco became the place to pursue those dreams and aspirations. Starting in 1893 and then again in 1909–10, the situation in the Spanish *presidios* of Ceuta and Melilla in northern Morocco became the site of constant small-scale engagements with the local tribesmen. The Army increased its call for reserves and for draftees to fight in Morocco which
triggered outbreaks of antigovernment violence in Barcelona and other cities.

One constructive thing that came out of the 1909–10 Melillan campaign was the creation of the Regulares by Lieutenant Colonel Dámaso Berenguer Fusté in 1911. The Regulares was a unit of Moroccan troops led by Spanish officers, and it would be the officers who began their careers with the Regulares such as José Millán Astray, Francisco Franco, Emilio Mola, and Juan Yagüe that would later go on to serve in the Spanish Foreign Legion or continue their careers with the Regulares. In addition, many of these officers would later serve as senior commanders of the Nationalist army during the Spanish Civil War. Because of their service and rapid promotions received as a result of combat duty with the Regulares and the Legion, these officers became known as Africanistas (Africanists), an identification which differentiated them from those officers who had served entirely on the Spanish peninsula (peninsulares).

Following the signing of the Treaty of Fez in 1912, Spain became even more involved in expanding its Protectorate in Spanish Morocco. While its conscripts fared poorly in fighting the Berbers and defending blockhouses trying to keep supply and communication networks open, the Regulares fared much better. Spanish policy in Morocco by 1920 was to pacify the rebellious tribesmen either through military power, bribes, or a combination of both, and to penetrate into the interior as much as possible. While Spanish advances in the Western Zone under the command of General Berenguer progressed smoothly, the situation in the Eastern Zone, under the command of General Manuel Fernández Silvestre, did not. General Silvestre had recklessly moved his army westward from Melilla with the goal of reaching the coastal town of Alhucemas Bay, deep in Riffian territory, without taking the necessary precaution of disarming the local tribesman and securing his flanks. Just after Silvestre reached the main camp at Annual in the summer of 1921, the Riffian chieftain, Sidi Mohammed ben Abd-el-Krim el Khattabi, and his fighters attacked and destroyed the Spanish force. What started as an orderly retreat became a flood of panic-stricken soldiers who dropped their weapons and ran for their very lives. Having lost his command and honor, General Silvestre took his own life. The Annual disaster was the worst colonial defeat since the defeat of the Italians at Adowa, Ethiopia, in 1896. Estimates of casualties range from a conservative 8,000 to a high of 15,000 not to mention enough small arms, heavy weapons, and ammunition to equip an army. Only the arrival of two banderas (battalions) of the recently created Spanish Foreign Legion kept the Spanish city of Melilla from being overrun by the Riffians and its inhabitants put to the knife as had happened to soldiers and civilians alike in other Spanish outposts.

The Annual disaster caused the fall of the ruling government, and a move by the Army to avenge their fallen comrades, recapture the territory
which had been lost to the Riffians, and regain their lost honor. With the Legion and *Regulares* serving as the “spearhead” for Spanish operations, the military was able to very slowly regain what had been lost. Abd-el-Krim’s army grew larger with every victory and the war in Morocco continued to drag on for years. There was no end in sight and great disagreement between politicians, *peninsulares*, and *Africanistas* on how the war should be fought. In 1923, General Miguel Primo de Rivera carried out a successful *pronunciamiento* (pronouncement). This type of military rising had occurred with some frequency during the nineteenth century, but during that period it had been most often a form of military pressure exerted to force the government to change its policies, rather than as a method to seize power in an armed coup d’état. In this regard, General Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship was with few precedents. As Spain’s new ruler, Miguel Primo de Rivera’s first order of business was to bring the war in Morocco to a close. At first his plan was to abandon the Protectorate, later his policy changed to withdrawing from isolated outposts to more secure positions behind the so-called “Primo de Rivera Line” (his detractors called it the “Abd-el-Krim Line”). Thousands of lives were lost trying to evacuate these vulnerable outposts, but it was accomplished by 1924. What began to bring the war in Morocco to an end was when Abd-el-Krim made the fatal error of attacking the French zone as well, which gained the insurgent leader a powerful new enemy and a broader front. This overly ambitious move pushed the French and the Spanish to join forces against the common foe, and a Spanish amphibious landing at Alhucemas Bay in 1925, supported by French naval gunfire, doomed the Riffians. During the next two years, the combination of Spanish and French forces defeated the Riffians and Abd-el-Krim was forced to surrender to the French who sent him into exile on Reunion Island off the coast of Madagascar.

Primo de Rivera would serve as dictator of Spain from 1923 to 1930. He is best remembered for ending the Moroccan War (1921–27), but he is also responsible for reforming the Army by, among other measures, reducing the size of the officer corps, acquiring better weapons and equipment, raising salaries, placing greater emphasis on merit promotions over seniority, and establishing the GMA (General Military Academy) in Zaragoza with General Francisco Franco as its first director in 1927.

However, opposition to Primo de Rivera’s reforms, particularly from the artillery branch, caused him to lose the Army’s support as republicanism began to increase in Spain. In 1931, having lost the support of his people and King Alfonso XIII, Primo de Rivera was forced to abdicate and go into self-imposed exile in Italy. The incoming government, the Second Republic (1931–39), would greatly affect the leadership of the Army, eventually leading to the start of the Civil War in 1936.
Spain was still a weak state as the Great War was beginning in 1914, recounted in Javier Ponce’s chapter, “World War I: Unarmed Neutrality.” The Spanish Army and navy were in no condition to be significant participants in the conflict, and the nation’s infrastructure was so dilapidated that the French declined initial offers to use its roads and railways to transit to Africa. Within Spain, many of the higher ranking aristocrats and military officers supported Germany, inspired as they were by Wilhelmine Germany’s martial traditions and rise to industrial prowess. Prime Minister Eduardo Dato also sympathized with the Central Powers. The Spanish king, Alfonso XIII, related by blood and marriage to the German and British royal families, initially favored the Allies, but once the war began seriously considered German entreaties, which hinted at the expansion of Spain’s colonies, the annexation of Portugal, and other forms of assistance. Although hopeful that Spain might break from its benevolent neutrality toward the Triple Entente, Germany realistically expected Alfonso XIII to do little more than remain a mediator between the two warring coalitions, and retain his freedom of maneuver for any eventuality. In public, the king and his government proclaimed Spain’s strict neutrality. The British and French received more support from Spain’s business leaders, middle classes, and republicans, identified as these three groups were through commercial and political ties to the Entente. As the war continued, most of even those few Spaniards who had supported Germany and Austria-Hungary realized that the Allies would emerge victorious from the war. Spain’s increasing trade with Britain and France, and the profits that ensued, also won support for the Allied cause.

Whatever the inclinations of Spain’s political class, the government had almost no means to intervene successfully in the European war, or even defend its own territory. On paper, the Spanish Army boasted 140,000 soldiers, but this force of mostly poor conscripts lacked modern weapons, strong leadership, adequate budgets, or even a clear mandate. Half of the army remained in Morocco and also received most of the limited modern equipment purchased by the Spanish government, undermining the ability of the military to conduct peninsular defense. The navy, despite several naval building programs, had still not recovered from the disaster of 1898 and remained unable to defend Spanish waters, much less conduct offensive operations in the Atlantic or Mediterranean. Spain did attempt to leverage its weakness into strength, by serving as a locus for mediating efforts between the two sides, and profiting from trade to both warring sides. The Spanish government did not manage the increased trade effectively, however, leading to significant military and working class unrest in 1917. The Spanish military emerged from World War I in essentially the same weak position as when it had begun, as the central government had proved unable to capitalize on the war to strengthen...
Spain’s economy, allocate resources to provide for a real defense, or identify sufficiently with the Allies to share in the spoils of war. While Spain’s military did not collapse during World War I, the conflict exposed yet again the deep fissures within the armed forces, divisions that would explode less than two decades later.

On July 17, 1936, elements of the Spanish Army rose up in revolt against the Popular Front government (a coalition of left-wing political parties), which had gained control in the February elections. The conspirators, led by General Emilio Mola, stationed in Pamplona at the time, were opposed to the military reforms which had been instituted by the leadership of the Second Republic since 1931. What the rebel generals expected would be a very quick coup d’etat turned into a three-year bloody, brutal, fratricidal conflict that involved not only Spaniards (liberal vs. conservative) but the major powers of Europe as well. In the “Spanish Civil War: Franco’s Nationalist Army” by George Esenwein and “The Popular Army of the Spanish Republic, 1936–39” by Michael Alpert, we are able to see the war from both sides. Esenwein begins his chapter on the Spanish Civil War by detailing how the Second Republic’s Minister of War, Manuel Azaña, moved quickly to dismantle what had previously been done by Primo de Rivera. As Esenwein notes, Azaña’s goal was twofold: to democratize the Army and to keep it out of politics. His reforms included reducing the number of senior rank officers by offering them early retirement and creating a new category for NCOs, as well as closing the anti-Republican GMA in Zaragoza and military journals. As ministers of war changed depending on elections, reforms were done and later undone. The military grew restless as they felt that their positions in the military and within society in general were threatened, while generals considered to be “dangerous” to the Republic were posted to Spanish Morocco (Mola), the Canary Islands (Franco), and the Balearic Islands (Manuel Goded) far from the peninsula.

By early July 1936, the plan to overthrow the government was coming together under Mola’s leadership. The revolt (Alzamiento) began prematurely, launched on July 17 by officers of the Foreign Legion in Melilla in Spanish Morocco, and quickly spread to the rest of the Protectorate and to the peninsula. In the conservative and strongly Catholic north, the revolt found support and the Carlist Requetés provided a highly motivated and loyal militia to support the rebellion. However, the rebellion failed in the three major cities of Spain: Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia. There, trade unions and their politicized militias refused to let the government be overthrown by disaffected generals. Leftist and anarchist trade unions rallied their workers, men and women, to defend the Popular Front government. While the revolt failed in the principal cities, Spanish Morocco became crucial to the nascent uprising. The battle-hardened and tested “Army of Africa” composed of the Moorish troops of the
Regulares and the Foreign Legion (roughly 34,000 officers and men) went over to the rebel Nationalists. With its experienced officer corps that had led units not only in Morocco but also against working-class Spaniards in the Leftist Asturias revolt of 1934, the Nationalists were in a much better position to exercise command and control over their forces. Transporting the Army of Africa across the Strait of Gibraltar would be the key to keeping the revolt from fizzling out. As the Navy had remained loyal to the Republic, after pro-coup officers had been murdered by their working-class crews, the only way to get the Army of Africa to the peninsula was by air. With only the gunboat Dato providing a naval escort, Franco was able to airlift his troops from Morocco to Seville where General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano had secured the city for the Nationalists. With the use of Italian and German bomber-transports, as well as a few Spanish Breguet transports, the Army of Africa was rapidly transferred from Tetuán to Seville. The 17th Company of the Vth Bandera of the Legion became the first military unit in history to be airlifted into combat on July 20. It has been said that Hitler told Franco that he should build a monument to the Junkers Ju-52 as it was this bomber-transport that allowed him to ferry the Army of Africa to Spain and thus kept the uprising from failing during the first days.

In both chapters, Alpert and Esenwein discuss the course of the war. During the first days and weeks of the conflict, the government was caught by surprise. Some trade union militias mounted an effective resistance to the rebels, and many local units of the Guardia Civil and other constabulary forces remained local to the Popular Front government in key cities such as Madrid and Barcelona. On the Nationalist side, Carlist and Falange militias also served a similar purpose as a force in existence. By the late summer of 1936, the battle lines had stabilized and Spain was divided. With Mola commanding the “Army of the North” and Franco the Army of Africa in the south, the aim of both was to take Madrid and end the war quickly. This was not to be as Franco’s forces were diverted away from Madrid to relieve a Loyalist siege at the Alcázar in Toledo where rebel colonel, José Moscardó, and about 1,000 others were trapped. Instead of proceeding to attack Madrid as Colonel Juan Yagüe of the Army of Africa advised, Franco replaced Yagüe with the highly decorated Africanista José Varela and moved to rescue those besieged in the Alcázar. The relief and rescue of those in Alcázar provided Franco with a great propaganda victory, but cost him the opportunity to capture Madrid since during this time, the Republic, and the people of Madrid, had been equipped with Mexican and Soviet weapons, and the people of Madrid had dug trenches and prepared other defenses that withstood repeated assaults by Franco’s troops.

As both authors write, the Spanish Civil War did not remain exclusively Spanish for long as Italy and Germany sided with the insurgent
Nationalists, while Mexico and the USSR supported the Republic. At first, weapons and equipment were shipped by both sides to Spain, while later Italian and German “volunteers” and technicians, as well as Soviet military officers, political commissars, and NKVD officials were sent by their respective governments. The Soviets went further via the Comintern when the call went out around the world for volunteers to come to Spain to fight fascism. Thousands of socialists, communists, and idealists heeded the call to arms as the International Brigades played a crucial role in defending the capital from the rebels.

In his chapter on the Army of the Republic, Alpert describes the difficulties faced by the government in trying to find qualified and experienced officers since the majority of these had opted for the Nationalist side. In the beginning, the militias served as the backbone of the government’s army and of those, the Spanish Communist Party’s (Quinto Regimiento) were the most disciplined and politically motivated. Also noted by Alpert is that during the Civil War, the Republicans were not only fighting the Nationalists but each other as the pro-Stalinist Spanish Communist Party tried to, and succeeded in eliminating its leftist rivals such as the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista or POUM. The Soviet Union would provide military support and other aid only to the Communists in Spain, not solely to defeat the rebels but to eliminate its enemies as well. So it can be said that the Republic was fighting a two-front war, one against Franco and another against itself.

Aside from describing the principal highlights of the war, such as the major battles and fronts, the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by Germany’s Condor Legion in 1937, and the foreign military equipment that was tried and tested out in Spain, the authors also detail the impact the war had on the nation and its peoples. One excellent observation made by Esenwein is what can be referred to as “Franco’s way of war.” Franco believed in a military strategy that focused on the slow, methodical advance making certain that those areas to your rear had been totally “pacified.” Enemy combatants had been killed in combat, summarily shot, or in fewer cases, taken prisoner. All enemies and/or potential enemies of the Cruzada in a certain town or province had to be eliminated before further operations could proceed. While this strategy infuriated Franco’s fascist allies (particularly the Germans who insisted that he drive for the enemy’s schwerpunkt), it perfectly suited the nature of this civil war where great hatred and animosity, based on social class, politics, and religion, had been festering at least since the start of the twentieth century. This was a war that could only be won through the physical eradication of the enemy. Moreover, Franco had lived through the disaster which had befallen General Silvestre at Annual in 1921, where Silvestre had failed to disarm those in his rear and had advanced too rapidly thus not protecting his flanks. Silvestre’s mistake was not one Franco was going to repeat.
The Spanish Civil War (or as the Nationalists called it—the War of Liberation) ended in 1939 with total victory for the Nationalists. Four months later, the outbreak of World War II in Europe would eventually engulf much of the world. Wayne H. Bowen’s chapter, “The Spanish Military During World War II,” examines the structure, operations, and politics of Spain’s armed forces during this global conflict. As it had been during World War I, Spain was officially neutral during World War II. However, the regime that governed Spain—that of General Francisco Franco—was clearly sympathetic to the Axis, providing moral and material support to Nazi Germany for the first few years of the struggle. Not only did Spanish soldiers and airmen serve in the German military, at the initiative of Spain’s government, but Madrid also aligned its diplomatic and commercial efforts alongside those of the Axis. While this identification with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy faded with the declining fortunes of Hitler and Mussolini, military and economic collaboration continued, albeit in reduced forms, until the end of the war.

The primary combat role of the military during World War II was on Spanish soil, however, fighting attempts by communist-led guerrillas to overthrow the Franco regime in the immediate postwar period. Spanish members of the French Resistance, who had fought against the Nazis in France, began to cross the border as early as late 1944, hoping to rally peasants and workers, as well as to force intervention by the Allies, to bring down the Spanish government. Along with the Guardia Civil—Spain’s national constabulary—the Spanish Army conducted operations in northern Spain to crush these incursions. By early 1946, the guerrilla movement failed, and the Franco regime reasserted its authority over the mountain valleys of northern Spain.

For most of the Spanish military, however, the war was one spent on the sidelines. Underfunded, underpaid, equipped with mediocre weapons, and filled with unwilling conscripts, the armed forces nonetheless played a vital role in the regime. As the force that had won the Civil War for Franco, the military held a special place of honor within the regime. Although its enlisted soldiers did not benefit from this association, its officer corps received special privileges and treatment, including food and housing allowances and opportunities to hold other salaried government and political positions without surrendering their commissions. Officers also understood that they were the foundation of the state and, with the Catholic Church, one of two key pillars ensuring the survival of Franco’s government.

The Spanish dictator was keen to maintain high morale among the officers of his military, recognizing that his own survival as Head of State depended on their forbearance. As the only institution with the means to overthrow Franco, the army was at once all-powerful and vulnerable to manipulation. Although he had significant flaws as a leader, Franco was
a master at ensuring his own endurance, primarily through keeping his enemies divided. Several times during World War II, groups of senior officers urged Franco to resign or surrender some of his power to accommodate a monarchical restoration. At other times, Naziphile military factions attempted to pressure Spain to enter the war on the side of the Axis. In each case, Franco sidestepped the central question, instead dividing the conspirators through selective promotions, demotions, and the use of internal and external exile. Despite his military background, Franco considered the military in ways similar to other institutions of government, awarding key positions based on loyalty rather than competence and giving primacy to political considerations at the expense of military necessity and efficiency.

During World War II, Franco had entertained dreams of expanding the Spanish empire through collaboration with the Axis. With the failure of that venture in 1945, Spain found itself diplomatically, commercially, and militarily isolated from the Great Powers and at odds with both Superpowers. Rather than a vast colonial empire, encompassing most of Northwest Africa, Spain entered the postwar era with modest imperial possessions. The development and eventual decline of this empire is the focus of Shannon E. Fleming’s chapter, “Decolonization and the Spanish Army, 1940–76.” The Spanish Empire, truncated after the debacle of 1898, remained central in the mentality, career, and operations of the Spanish military during these years. With Franco himself being an Africanista, loath to abandon Morocco and other overseas territories, the Spanish military struggled mightily against the wave of decolonization that began after World War II.

Spanish Morocco held a special place in the minds of many officers, including Franco, who had earned his early promotions and medals in the territory. Believing that they had a special link to the Berbers and Arabs of the colony, Spanish soldiers and colonial officials tolerated the presence of pro-independence leaders, with the unrealistic expectation that these Moroccans would only target the neighboring French colony. Franco’s pro-Arab policies also included funding development projects, refusing to recognize Israel, and encouraging “a paternalist rapport” with indigenous leaders. As the campaign for independence gained support in French Morocco, however, these ideas spread to the Spanish territory. By the mid-1950s, it became obvious that Spain’s hold on its Moroccan enclave was untenable, and in 1956 Spain followed France in recognizing independent Morocco.

Despite the loss of its Moroccan territory, Spain still held its colonies of Equatorial Guinea, Spanish Sahara, Ifni, and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, the latter three entirely surrounded by Morocco. Unlike Spanish Morocco, these three colonies had mostly Spanish populations, thus increasing resistance by Madrid to the idea of giving up sovereignty.
Moroccan forces supported unsuccessful guerrilla operations against Ifni in the late 1950s, but Spain retained control of the enclave until 1969. Unlike Spain’s North African territories, Equatorial Guinea never developed indigenous rebel groups, allowing Spain to move the colony toward independence without any crises or humiliations. In 1968, Spain granted independence.

Even after the Spanish surrender of its part of Morocco and Ifni, the kingdom of Morocco still hoped to gain control over Spanish Sahara, especially given the rich deposits of phosphates in the territory. By the early 1970s, Spain also confronted the Polisario movement, a rebellion of native Saharawis who wanted independence, rather than union with Morocco. Unable to crush this insurgency, and fearing open war with Morocco, in late 1975, as Francisco Franco lay in a persistent coma, the Spanish government began to negotiate the surrender of the colony. In early 1976, Spain withdrew the last of its military and civilian personnel, leaving Spanish Sahara to be divided between Morocco and Mauritania. The North African cities of Ceuta and Melilla, populated almost entirely by Spaniards, did not fall to the colonization process, remaining in Spanish hands.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, as Spain was dismantling its colonial empire, it was also successfully attempting to reenter the political and economic sphere of Western Europe. This movement is the subject of Chapter 8, “Rejoining Europe: From Isolation to Integration, 1945–2006,” by José M. Serrano and Kenneth W. Estes. The authors present the modernization of the Spanish military over the sixty years after World War II as a series of modest steps, each of which brought Spain closer to Western Europe and NATO in terms of equipment, structure, and doctrine. By the early twenty-first century, the Spanish armed forces were nearly comparable to those of Britain and France, in terms of their quality and capabilities, and were fully integrated into the NATO system.

After more than a decade of military isolation, inadequate funding, poor training, and weak leadership, in 1953 the Spanish government signed several cooperation agreements with the United States. Not only did these accords allow the United States to base strategic aircraft in Spain, but they also committed the United States to provide military equipment and training to the Spanish military. While this assistance was modest and did not live up to the expectations of Franco and his commanders, U.S. military sales and transfers to Spain began the process of modernization. U.S. restrictions on the types of equipment—only defensive—and its employment—only within the Spanish peninsula—rankled, but the aid was nonetheless a significant improvement.

The growing economy of the 1960s allowed Spain to increase its acquisitions of modern equipment, and its increasing ties with Western Europe demonstrated in its purchases from the United Kingdom, France,
and other NATO states. At the same time, the Spanish military became an increasingly professional and depoliticized force. Despite being the bulwark of the Franco regime, and having triumphed during the Spanish Civil War, after the mid-1950s officers increasingly viewed their role as defenders of Spain against the external threat of the Soviet Union, rather than as guardians of internal security.

The death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975 and the nearly simultaneous loss of the last of the Spanish colonial empire accelerated Spain’s integration into Europe and the modernization of its military forces. After holding democratic elections and surviving an attempted military coup in 1981, Spain joined the alliance in 1982. Now under an elected Socialist government, Spain began to distance itself from the more visible terms of its 1953 agreements with the United States, voting by referendum in 1986 to close U.S. air bases, while maintaining membership in NATO. In 1988, Spain joined the Western European Union and accelerated its full military integration into NATO.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Spain reduced the size of its forces, while increasing the capabilities of its forces through better equipment and training. The Spanish military provided important support to Coalition Forces in the Gulf War, and Spain became a major participant in the NATO-led peacekeeping operations in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999). Conscription ended in late 2002 under a conservative government, and the increasingly professional armed forces continued to be a significant tool of Spain’s foreign policy, participating in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11, although the latter involvement ended with the election of a Socialist government in 2004.

The final chapter focuses on the roles of the Spanish military in struggles against terrorism, especially the Basque movement ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna). From its beginnings in the 1950s, ETA emerged as a serious threat to internal security in northern Spain, with national and international capabilities. Using bombings, assassination, political coercion, and extortion, ETA became one of the most important terrorist groups in Western Europe. The response by the Spanish government, and the Spanish military, involved a combination of military operations, law enforcement, and political pressure against ETA and its collaborators, culminating in successful campaigns to arrest most of the group’s key leaders, bans on political activity by movements tied to ETA, and increasing autonomy for the Basque region as a way to co-opt more moderate Basque leaders, such as those in the largest legal movement, the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco—Basque Nationalist Party).

ETA’s most spectacular early success was the assassination of Admiral Luis Carrero, Franco’s chief adviser and rumored successor, in 1973. The regime immediately began a fierce, although somewhat incoherent, military, and law enforcement campaign against ETA, an effort which
continued through the years of transition to democracy. Under the new democratic system of the late 1970s, however, the granting of autonomy to the Basque region greatly undermined ETA’s maximalist demands for an independent state in northern Spain and southern France. The height of ETA violence, and counterreaction by the state, was from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. After that point, ETA’s terrorism, however bloody, was of decreasing effectiveness in rallying Basque popular opinion or convincing the Spanish public to grant independence. ETA’s freedom of movement continued to decline throughout the 1990s and early twenty-first century, with increasingly effective law enforcement, collaboration from other European states, and divisions within the underground movement.

Other terrorist movements also were active in Spain during the 1970s and 1980s, including the revolutionary communist faction GRAPO (Grupo de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre), smaller regional separatist movements, and antidemocratic movements on the extreme right. None of these rose to the importance of ETA, either in the national consciousness or in the impact on politics, although for a brief period the extreme violence of GRAPO brought it national attention and clandestine (and sometimes illegal) action against it by the Spanish government. Most recently, Spain experienced terrorist attacks linked to supporters of Al-Qaeda, most infamously in the March 2004 commuter train bombings in Madrid.

The role of the Spanish military in the war on terrorism has been of decreasing internal importance, despite Spain’s deployment of forces to Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11. While during the Franco regime and early years of the democratic transition, the military played a significant role in counterterrorism operations, by mid-1980s the army’s involvement was reduced to a minimum. Instead, the national police and Guardia Civil took the lead against ETA, GRAPO, and other terrorist movements, even though ETA continued to target military officers for assassination in its campaign to gain recognition as an active belligerent.

In the two centuries since 1808, the history of the Spanish military has been the history of Spain, from its mythical role during the Napoleonic occupation, to the clefs of the Carlist Wars, to its mixed record as a colonial power, to the military regimes established by its generals through coups and rebellions, to its final integration into Western Europe as a professionalized force. For most of this history, the Spanish Army was a failed institution, divided by political factions, poorly equipped, and vulnerable to external invasion and internal dissent. Prone to military coups in the nineteenth century, it was an irony that the most enduring government established through an attempted military coup, General Francisco Franco’s (1936–75), set the stage for the professionalization, depoliticization, and integration into Europe of the Spanish military.
The role of the Spanish Army in shaping its country’s history was probably as great as that of any European armed force in the nineteenth century. In addition to fighting an invasion by Napoleon’s armies, two major civil wars, and colonial conflicts in the Americas, the Pacific, and Africa, the Spanish Army also exercised decisive, long-term influence on Spain’s political scene. Indeed, it is the military’s political influence in Spain that has received the most attention from historians, especially those studying the country after the final expulsion of the Napoleonic invaders in 1814.1

This chapter, however, focuses on the wars themselves and the fighting methods of the Spanish Army, discussing the politics, social composition, and cultural characteristics of the armed forces only insofar as they influenced military operations. It is of course impossible to tell the whole story of nineteenth-century Spanish military history in a single chapter, and most of the Latin American wars of independence are not covered here. Yet even a relatively short overview of the evolution of the army and the wars it waged can shed light on certain patterns in tactics, operations, and strategy, many of which reflected or even influenced other aspects of Spanish history.

As we will see, some kinds of failures on the battlefield repeated themselves tragically and unnecessarily, in large part because Spanish Army leaders proved unable or unwilling to accept the primacy of irregular warfare to their work. It did not help, moreover, that Spain’s military institutions suffered from a constantly changing political scene; between 1814 and 1899, Spain had 129 ministers of war, including interim