



Philosophische Fakultät

Bastian Matteo Scianna

## Stuck in the past?

British views on the Spanish army's effectiveness  
and military culture, 1946–1983

Suggested citation referring to the original publication:

War & Society (2018)

DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2019.1524347>

ISSN (print) 0729-2473

ISSN (online) 2042-4345

Postprint archived at the Institutional Repository of the Potsdam University in:

Postprints der Universität Potsdam

Philosophische Reihe ; 153

ISSN 1866-8380

<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:kobv:517-opus4-420615>



# Stuck in the past? British views on the Spanish army's effectiveness and military culture, 1946–1983

BASTIAN MATTEO SCIANNA

*Department of History, University of Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany*

After the Civil War the Spanish army functioned as a guardian of domestic order, but suffered from antiquated material and little financial means. These factors have been described as fundamental reasons for the army's low potential wartime capability. This article draws on British and German sources to demonstrate how Spanish military culture prevented an augmented effectiveness and organisational change. Claiming that the army merely lacked funding and modern equipment, falls considerably short in grasping the complexities of military effectiveness and organisational cultures, and might prove fatal for current attempts to develop foreign armed forces in conflict or post-conflict zones.

**KEYWORDS** Spain, Franco, military effectiveness, military culture, organisational change

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Spanish army has more often fought domestic enemies than foreign invaders. In the first half of the twentieth century, the army remained an important political factor, despite 'inherent deficiencies in education, discipline and unity'.<sup>1</sup> After the Civil War, the oversized and costly armed forces stayed the paramount guardian of General Franco's regime. They enjoyed many benefits and acted as an internal barrier against social and political change.<sup>2</sup> The so-called Blue Division, which fought on the Eastern Front during the Second

<sup>1</sup> S. G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967), 4.

<sup>2</sup> P. Preston, *The Politics of Revenge. Fascism and the Military in 20th Century Spain* (London: Routledge, 1995), 145, 157. In 1968, still around 80% of the overall budget accounted for salaries, which left little funds for training or new equipment. Spanish defence spending, as part of total GDP was, however, not notably below NATO standards; even though overall defence expenditure as a percentage of public spending decreased continuously from around 50% in the late 1940s to 20% in 1974: J. J. Olivás Osuna, *Iberian Military Politics. Controlling the Armed Forces during Dictatorship and Democratisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 68, 149f.

World War, was the only formation that gained experience in modern warfare.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Spanish army was not necessarily spearheading military change. It has been argued that a ‘confusion between military and political values hindered the advancement of military professionalism’.<sup>4</sup> Due to its domestic function, it was unthinkable to shrink the army, redeploy it, abandon conscription, or enforce early officer retirement. Additionally, Spain suffered from weak finances, an underdeveloped defence industry, an unskilled workforce, and — without facing direct threats from neighbouring countries — political isolation in the early stages of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Was a lack of funds and limited access to modern material the main reason for a backward and inefficient army? Did politics and internal duties alone impede a higher effectiveness and lead to a standstill in organisational development?

In order to answer these questions this article analyses British assessments to track long-term developments of the Spanish army after the Second World War. This article cannot offer internal Spanish views or an encompassing history of the Spanish armed forces — the navy and air force will only be occasionally included. This article will analyse if the Spanish army could have been more than a Praetorian Guard and tries to determine its military value. It will investigate which factors prevented an increased military effectiveness and analyse its organisational culture. Further it will compare how the British judged actual performance (in war and in exercises) and hypothetical capabilities. The starting point will be the immediate post-Second World War period and the onset of US military assistance. Secondly, the Ifni War 1957–1958 will serve as a short litmus test to determine if outside stimuli had helped. Thirdly, internal reform attempts after the Ifni War will be investigated, before fourthly, looking at changes during the democratic transition after Franco’s death until the early 1980s.

This article argues that whatever financial and material help the Spanish army may have received, it could not overcome the genuine defects it was suffering from: its organisational culture and inadequate training, which enhanced deficiencies in equipment and further reduced tactical and operational effectiveness. Half-hearted internal reforms could not succeed whilst an inaccessible class of officers with little appetite for change prevented independent decision-making and barred organisational change towards greater professionalism — with the sanctum of a status quo-orientated regime. Thus, claiming that the army merely lacked funding and modern equipment falls considerably short of grasping the complexities of military effectiveness;<sup>6</sup> innovation and adaptation processes;<sup>7</sup> and different national and

<sup>3</sup> Around 47,000 men had seen service on the Eastern Front: W. H. Bowen, *Spain during World War II* (Columbia, MO: Missouri UP, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Olivás Osuna, 113.

<sup>5</sup> S. G. Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936–1975* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin UP, 1987), 417ff.

<sup>6</sup> The literature on this topic is vast, yet hardly linked to historical studies. See foremost S. Biddle, *Military Power. Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004); A. R. Millet, M. Williamson and K. H. Watman, ‘The Effectiveness of Military Organizations’, in *Military Effectiveness. Volume 1. The First World War*, ed. by Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 1–30.

<sup>7</sup> S. P. Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1991); D. Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation. The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010).

organisational cultures;<sup>8</sup> and might prove fatal for current attempts to develop foreign armed forces in conflict or post-conflict zones.

## Assessing the Spanish: British reporting after the Second World War

Observing armies' responses to on-going challenges, assessing their capabilities, and understanding their organisational habits are fundamental tasks of military attachés.<sup>9</sup> During the Cold War, Spain held strategic importance as a possible last resort after a Soviet invasion and the British closely observed the Spanish armed forces, not least because the Gibraltar question remained a thorny issue.<sup>10</sup> They usually sent a Brigadier as Military Attaché (MA) to Madrid (flanked by a Naval and Air Attaché) who would send their annual report 'under cover of a despatch from the Ambassador'.<sup>11</sup> There are limitations to such subjective assessments on the 'other side of the hill'. The British noted some restrictions in acquiring information despite visits, manoeuvre attendances and personal contacts.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in contrast to journalistic or civilian assessments, the MA reports constitute an excellent source, with professional insights by officers who usually served three-year turns during which they acquired considerable expertise on the country's army. Additionally, several German attaché reports from the 1970s to 1980s were consulted to provide another view on this vital transformation period. French or American assessments would be another interesting source, yet the limited space of this paper made a restriction necessary.

In April 1946, Brigadier William Wyndham Torre Torr compiled the first report after the Second World War. At the time of writing, he had served with high acclaim for seven years in Madrid. Torr acknowledged the good esprit de corps in most regiments and 'many keen officers, upright, efficient and devoted to their profession' that were bound to the regime by their monarchist anti-democratic outlook and the privileges granted to them.<sup>13</sup> He noted the army's primary domestic tasks and its inability for offensive operations, owing to a deficiency in modern material, effective training, petrol and air support. The territorial dislocation made big-unit training areas problematic to reach and turned manoeuvres into an unaffordable luxury — in fact, no large-scale exercises had been organised since the start of the Civil War.<sup>14</sup> In conclusion, he thought the reform efforts failed to 'raise the army as a fighting force into

<sup>8</sup> W. P. Hinkle et al., *Why Nations Differ in Military Skill* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defence Analyses, 1999); S. P. Rosen, 'Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters', *International Security*, 19 (1995), 5–31.

<sup>9</sup> Dated, but still valuable is A. Vagts, *The Military Attaché* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967), 189ff.

<sup>10</sup> F. Portero, 'Spain, Britain and the Cold War', in *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Sebastian Balfour and Paul Preston (London: Routledge, 1999), 210–228.

<sup>11</sup> Kew, United Kingdom, The National Archives, [henceforth TNA], FO 371/117897, RS1202/1, D. F. Muirhead (FO) to Madrid, 1 February 1955.

<sup>12</sup> TNA FCO 9/1297, Sir John Russell (Madrid) to FO, 10 June 1970, 1.

<sup>13</sup> TNA FO 371/60462, Z3682, Brigadier Torr to Sir V. Mallet, 3 April 1946, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

anything like the category of a modern European army'.<sup>15</sup> This, so Torr, was also a problem of mentality: the army rested on its Civil War 'laurels', without analysing lessons from the Second World War, or drastically reducing its size.<sup>16</sup>

In the following years, the various British attachés largely upheld these assessments. Despite admiring the soldiers' morale and braveness, old malaises persisted: no manoeuvres above regimental level, no skilled reserves, poor infrastructure that would hamper mobilisation and movements, no modern equipment, out of date doctrines and general training — the latter being described as 'remarkable neither for intensity nor originality'.<sup>17</sup> After participating in the Divisional Commanders Course at the *Escuela Superior del Ejército* (Higher Army College) in 1958, a British Major panned the antiquated instruction methods and the officers' poor physical state. He also contrasted abundant theoretical knowledge with scarce practical experience, little tactical ability, neglect of supply and logistics, neither training nor conviction in wireless commanding, and an over-confidence in the fighting ability of Spanish soldiers.<sup>18</sup> The other services hardly received better scores. Even the Spanish Navy — usually regarded as the best service branch — was considered as 'at least 12 years behind the times'.<sup>19</sup>

The British attempted to improve bonds to the Spaniards, not least out of commercial and political interests. The two navies kept their traditional closeness<sup>20</sup> and relations with the Spanish army were described as 'basically friendly'.<sup>21</sup> Yet, cooperation with the US became the most important corner stone for the Spanish modernisation attempts. It started with the 1953 Madrid Agreement, which included material and training assistance in exchange for granting the US access to naval and air bases in Spain.<sup>22</sup> Paul Preston has hinted at several disadvantages of the agreement: the Spaniards were merely given second-hand surplus material from the Korean War, while their home-grown defence industry remained technologically behind and real army reform never happened.<sup>23</sup> The British documents provide insights as to why a resolute turnover towards an enhanced operational effectiveness did not occur.

For the British it was clear that 'whatever the exact sum of money to be spent by America on the army, the net result cannot do more than rearm a small part of this large rambling army'.<sup>24</sup> Spain continued to field around twenty divisions, whereas

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. The army alone consisted of some 26,000 officers, 25,000 NCOs and 250,000 men.

<sup>17</sup> TNA FO 371/89568, WS1194/1, Annual Report Spanish Army, 28 January 1950, 2; TNA FO 371/144965, RS1202/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1958, 8 April 1959, 2.

<sup>18</sup> TNA FO 371/136682, RS1201/2, Report by Major R. A. Readman, 29 August 1958, 1-3, 5.

<sup>19</sup> TNA FO 371/89568, WS1194/1, Report by British Naval Attaché (Madrid) on the Spanish Navy 1949, 28 January 1950, 5.

<sup>20</sup> TNA FO 371/140361, RS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1956, 24 January 1957, 4.

<sup>21</sup> TNA FO 371/113063, WS1197/7, Goulburn (MA Madrid) to Hogg (WO), 9 November 1954.

<sup>22</sup> The US gained access and joint command (under Spanish flag) to three air force bases in Torrejón, Morón, and Zaragoza, and one submarine base in Rota, near Cádiz.

<sup>23</sup> Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 138. The platforms received were often tanks, trucks, and artillery from the Korean War or earlier, while the financial help was considerably smaller in contrast to US assistance to other Western states: Olivas Osuna, 154-155.

<sup>24</sup> TNA FO 371/117897, RS1202/1, Annual Report Spanish Army 1954, 19 January 1955, 2.

the defence industry and available national resources could only sustain six operational divisions.<sup>25</sup> A regular Spanish infantry division could muster full strength with modern infantry weapons, while other ‘teeth’ units — like the artillery and engineers — were reduced to one-third of their ideal levels and were equipped with obsolete equipment. The supporting ‘tail’ was so underdeveloped that divisions were statically bound to their home depot and could only defend their military district after six months mobilisation and ‘without any flexibility owing to [the] great shortage and unreliability of existing communication equipment’.<sup>26</sup> A sheer lack of modern material was, however, not the only problem.

Cultural factors also limited the value of foreign assistance. The British criticised that an ‘old guard’ was blocking the advancement of junior officers, which particularly frustrated those who had attended courses with the US Army. Political reasons prevented forced retirement and so ‘the average age of Spanish officers [was] at least ten years higher, rank for rank, than officers of the British Army’.<sup>27</sup> The British described an ‘all-round beneficial effect’ by the sheer feeling that the US was helping them.<sup>28</sup> New ideas on modern warfare entered Spanish military thought<sup>29</sup> and American training missions in Spain and in the US led to ‘considerable improvement’.<sup>30</sup> The British appreciated the armoured and mountain divisions’ training level,<sup>31</sup> the rank-and-file were ascribed very high morale and toughness, and many officers were perceived as capable small unit commanders.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, when a group of senior Spanish officers took part in a US exercise in Germany in 1960, they ‘did not take kindly to this arrangement of living in the field and suggested that they would be more comfortable living in hotels and starting their observations after breakfast each morning, which they were not permitted to do’.<sup>33</sup> The episode exemplifies the many cases of social and cultural restraints that have also been noted in several Arab armies, where ‘status is associated with distance from one’s subordinates, and hands-on mastery of technical detail by superior officers is discouraged’.<sup>34</sup>

Despite minor reform efforts, transfer of ideas, and the US assistance in material, training and maintenance there had been no improvement regarding the Spanish

<sup>25</sup> TNA FO 371/140361, RS1201/1, MA’s Annual Report Spanish Army 1956, 24 January 1957, 6.

<sup>26</sup> TNA FO 371/117897, RS1202/1, Annual Report Spanish Army 1954, 19 January 1955, 1.

<sup>27</sup> TNA FO 371/140361, RS1201/1, MA’s Annual Report Spanish Army 1956, 24 January 1957, 1.

<sup>28</sup> TNA FO 371/117897, RS1202/1, Annual Report Spanish Army 1954, 19 January 1955, 1.

<sup>29</sup> TNA FO 371/163819, CS1201/2, MA’s Annual Report Spanish Army 1961, 24 January 1962, 1. The Spaniards were impressed by divisional training camps in the US and planned to implement similar instruction sites in each of their military regions. FO 371/153263, RS1201/1, Monthly Report January 1960, 18 March 1960, 1.

<sup>30</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/2, MA’s Annual Report Spanish Army 1959, 12 March 1960, 3.

<sup>31</sup> TNA FO 371/140361, RS1201/1, MA’s Annual Report Spanish Army 1956, 24 January 1957, 5–6. Also the paratroopers received special praise: TNA FO 371/140361, RS1201/3, Lt. Col. J. N. Thomas (WO) to W. H. Young (FO), 21 February 1957.

<sup>32</sup> TNA FO 371/117897, RS1202/1, Annual Report Spanish Army 1954, 19 January 1955, 1. The British MA also lauded the army’s recognition of the vital role of warrant officers and assessed that they were groomed successfully as loyal and capable backbone of the army: TNA FO 371/140361, RS1201/1, MA’s Annual Report Spanish Army 1956, 24 January 1957, 2.

<sup>33</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/1, Monthly Report February 1960, 5 April 1960, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Biddle, 50.

Army's underlying problems: its sheer size, political caveats, lack of initiative, schematic piecemeal training and dreadful support services. This 'large rambling army' then faced a serious challenge in a conflict over territory that deeply concerned Spanish military honour: Morocco.

### The Ifni War (23 October 1957–30 June 1958)

Operations in Morocco in the 1920s had been a crucial formative period for a generation of Spanish officers, not least for the Spanish Legion and Franco himself.<sup>35</sup> Before Morocco gained independence in 1956, the Spanish had supported rebel groups opposing French colonial rule; a policy that partially backlashed as many of these irregulars then threatened Spanish possessions in the Western Sahara — as well as Ceuta and Melilla — with official Moroccan backing.<sup>36</sup> Today's scholarship tends to judge the Spanish performance poorly,<sup>37</sup> but British reports offer contemporary views by professional soldiers and merit a closer look.

When hostilities started in October 1957, the Moroccan-supported Army of Liberation took the Spanish by surprise, notwithstanding intelligence reports that had suggested an imminent attack. Relieving besieged garrisons in Ifni (Spain's province on Morocco's Atlantic coast) proved to be tricky, but airdrops and mechanized columns prevented disaster and subsequently the Spanish concentrated their defence on Sidi Ifni itself. Spanish possessions were highly vulnerable to attacks, owing to severe supply problems: the Ifni exclave, for example, had neither strategic depth nor a real port, which meant that supplies for up to 20,000 men had to be unloaded over open beaches. The absence of adequate landing craft further complicated the debarkation of men and supplies; additionally, many outposts remained 'unsupported by mobile reserves or air forces, [which] invited defeat in detail'.<sup>38</sup>

In this first phase of the war, the British considered the paratroopers as fighting 'well' and 'effective', while the 'mechanized columns experienced many of the difficulties of traversing difficult country, and were continually susceptible to ambush'.<sup>39</sup> After stabilising their defences, the Spanish tried to force battles upon their guerrilla enemies. The sheer size of the theatre turned this into a challenging endeavour. The Army of Liberation maintained the initiative and raided Spanish supply lines and columns.<sup>40</sup> The Spanish could count on French reconnaissance

<sup>35</sup> P. Preston, *Franco* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 16, 27ff; S. Balfour, *Deadly Embrace. Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); J. Busquets, *El Militar de Carrera en España* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1984), 99ff. In early 1956, the Spanish still retained 70,800 men in their protectorate and 26,600 in Ceuta and Melilla: Shannon E. Flemming, 'Decolonization and the Spanish Army, 1940–1976', in *A Military History of Modern Spain. From the Napoleonic Era to the International War on Terror*, ed. by W. H. Bowen and José E. Álvarez (London: Praeger, 2007), 122–135, here 128.

<sup>36</sup> The abandonment of Morocco in 1956 had been highly unpopular with the army and Franco resorted to pay raises to counter growing discontent: Olivas Osuna, 152.

<sup>37</sup> For a concise overview: Olivas Osuna, 118; Fleming, 130ff.

<sup>38</sup> TNA FO 371/144965, RS1202/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1958, 8 April 1959, 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.



and combat aircraft to end this indecisive stalemate; half a dozen French battalions guarded the borders with Algeria and French Mauretania, cutting off a safe haven for the insurgents. The necessity for this assistance hinted at Spanish weaknesses in aerial reconnaissance and combined arms operations. Still, counter-insurrectionary warfare was arguably what the Spanish army was most prepared for. For years the British had labelled the counter-guerrilla exercises as cheap, simple and highly popular, being 'notably in the Spanish tradition'.<sup>41</sup>

The Franco-Spanish offensive started on 10 February 1958. The plan envisaged firstly moving eastwards with mechanized columns from Villa Bens and El Ayun and then southwards to encircle the rebels, sealing them off from the northern parts on the Moroccan border. The Army of Liberation foresaw the Franco-Spanish intention and evaded envelopment, but the operation succeeded in removing insurgents from the northern and central zones and denied them access to the Spanish Sahara and Mauritania. The Spanish, however, never gained absolute control over the borders or the interior of the Spanish Sahara and Ifni. Despite being described as 'extremely ruthless in more or less clearing the whole [Ifni] enclave of its native or Moroccan population, to the number of something like 30,000, and destroying everything as they went',<sup>42</sup> the French lamented the renewed stalemate and acknowledged that they had 'not been entirely successful'.<sup>43</sup>

The British considered the operations an 'achievement on the part of the Spanish Army', bringing in reinforcements under severe conditions by sea and by air.<sup>44</sup> Their judgment took the logistical nightmare and the typical caveats of any counter-insurgency campaign into consideration.<sup>45</sup> Thus, observers on the ground and professional soldiers seemed to have conceded some degree of operational success, while the strategic political outcome was rather negative. Nothing had been solved, but the Spanish army was believed capable of dealing 'effectively' with any future problems in the North African possessions, from within or from outside.<sup>46</sup> The Spanish army itself was also displeased with the obtained results.<sup>47</sup> With 200 men killed and 573 wounded<sup>48</sup> the casualties had remained lower than expected, which has been ascribed to the 'professionalism of local commanders and French assistance [rather] than the support the troops received from Madrid'.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, the Spanish army had defended the *status quo ante* at a time when other European powers were forced to retreat (with little military glory) from their

<sup>41</sup> TNA FO 371/169497, CS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1962, 15 January 1963, 5.

<sup>42</sup> TNA FO 371/131526, JM1019/11, C. B. Duke (British Embassy Rabat) to FO, 26 February 1958 (in 'post scriptum'). The number does not refer to fatalities, but constitutes a rough estimate of people uprooted from their homes.

<sup>43</sup> TNA FO 371/131526, JM1019/10, British Embassy Paris to FO, 27 February 1958.

<sup>44</sup> TNA FO 371/144965, RS1202/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1958, 8 April 1959, 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the author and British MA at the time, Brigadier Philip H. Graves-Morris (1907-1991), was very familiar with peculiarities of counter-insurrectionary war in difficult geographical areas after active service in Palestine, East Africa, Burma, and Malaya.

<sup>46</sup> TNA FO 371/163819, CS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1961, 24 January 1962, 6.

<sup>47</sup> FO 371/153263, RS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1959, 12 March 1960, 6.

<sup>48</sup> F. Reinlein, *Capitanes Rebeldes. Los militares españoles durante la Transición: de la UMD al 23-F* (Madrid: La Esfera, 2002), 45.

<sup>49</sup> Flemming, 138.

colonial possessions. The amphibious landings and supply operations astonished military observers, while the army's indecisive operations against irregular enemies were nothing bewildering in such a type of conflict. Yet, the Ifni War had exposed weaknesses in combined arms and aerial operations — that is, decisive indicators of a military's cutting-edge skills and training levels. Unsurprisingly, the war was followed by a period of modernisation attempts.

### The 1960s–1970s: reform or stagnation?

In 1957, the new Army Minister, General Antonio Barroso y Sánchez Guerra (1893–1992), initiated a reform that encompassed three fields: organisation, equipment, doctrine and training. It came at a time when the Spanish economic boom left many soldiers out, while student and labour unrests deeply concerned the military.<sup>50</sup> The army command was still in the hands of men who owed their career and social status to Franco. It was this group, the so-called 'bunker' of many Blue Division veterans, which continued to lobby against changes advocated by the liberally minded Democratic Military Union (UMD), instead demanding more repressive means to counter, for example, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna's (ETA) terrorism and separatist tendencies.<sup>51</sup> The result was an anti-professional attitude where the 'term technocrat had come to be synonymous [ ... ] with civilian weakness'.<sup>52</sup>

At first, the Spanish army was reluctant to discuss transformations or to allow British visits to the new 'Experimental Units'.<sup>53</sup> The army's size was reduced from around 20–14 divisions, modelled on the American 'Pentomic' structure. These three infantry divisions, plus the armoured and the two mountain divisions, received most of the new material and additional training,<sup>54</sup> as US-supplied petrol enabled them to stage larger manoeuvres.<sup>55</sup> In fact, only the three Experimental Divisions, the Mountain Divisions, and the Parachute Brigade were deemed capable of doing their part alongside the modern armies of Western Europe.<sup>56</sup> Their performances in manoeuvres, including the Legion, were rated higher,<sup>57</sup> while even the mechanized formations lacked 'training and efficient engineer, signals and administrative backing'.<sup>58</sup> The all-volunteer paratroopers in particular were repeatedly complimented for their toughness and training standards. The Spaniards were also more willing to invite British MAs to visit their exercises than they were to other

<sup>50</sup> Between 1970 and 1976 the percentage of professional soldiers who relied on a second income increased from 20.3% to 27.4%: Busquets, 228.

<sup>51</sup> On the UMD and reform ideas: Reinlein, *Capitanes Rebeldes*.

<sup>52</sup> Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 151.

<sup>53</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/1, Monthly Report February 1960, 1. The MAs were, if invited at all, given selected view points from which to follow the manoeuvres, which made it 'difficult to gain any indication of the efficiency of the command and control of the individual units'. TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/1, Monthly Report June to September 1960, 3.

<sup>54</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1959, 12 March 1960, 1.

<sup>55</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/1, Monthly Report January 1960, 1.

<sup>56</sup> TNA FO 371/160278, RS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1960, 10 February 1961, 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 9–10.

<sup>58</sup> TNA FO 371/169497, CS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1962, 15 January 1963, 5, 10.

formations.<sup>59</sup> The British therefore recommended the creation of a large volunteer contingent to attract the badly needed technical and mechanical expertise.<sup>60</sup>

The Spaniards, however, needed time to master the US-supplied material and indulge themselves with new doctrines, which made the:

slowest progress due to the triple handicaps of Spanish instinctive resistance to change, the age structure of the officer corps [...] and the Spanish Army's attitude, reinforced by that of the Regime of allowing little discussion on doctrine. The regulations and the generals are always right.<sup>61</sup>

This anti-reformist culture was reinforced at academies and staff colleges where — much to the dislike of younger men who had been trained abroad — new ideas were banned and independent thinking discouraged.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the British depicted the quality of officers and NCOs as deteriorating, while the rank-and-file was as usually praised as tough and durable, despite lavish appearance and housing conditions unacceptable for British standards.<sup>63</sup> The social prestige and the resulting professional pride were thought to make the soldiers endure monotonous service, underpayment and slow promotion with high morale and 'an inner fibre'.<sup>64</sup>

Further weaknesses were the supporting arms, the paucity of modern tanks, artillery, air defence and anti-tank systems, incompetent reservists, no supply training in the field; no army air service, and a rigid adherence to old doctrines and antiquated instruction methods.<sup>65</sup> The officer corps was too numerous, overage and hampered by part-time jobs; few specialists existed to operate and to maintain advanced war material,<sup>66</sup> and staff work was ineffective and protracted with little cross-branch cooperation.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, senior officers were seen as 'hesitant in making decisions and remaining shy of using radio communications personally'.<sup>68</sup>

In 1962, the new Army Minister, Camilo Menendez Tolosa (1899–1971) was expected to more seriously confront these weaknesses. The army was split into two main categories: the FFI (*Fuerzas de Intervencion Inmediata*, or Field Army) and the FDOT (*Fuerzas de Defensa Operativa del Territorio*, Territorial Army). The

<sup>59</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/1, Monthly Report December, 1959, 19 February 1960, 3.

<sup>60</sup> TNA FO 371/169497, CS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1962, 15 January 1963, 1. Influenced by their own tradition, the British repeatedly criticised conscription and argued for more professional soldiers.

<sup>61</sup> TNA FO 371/163819, CS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1961, 24 January 1962, 1; TNA FO 371/169497, CS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1962, 15 January 1963, 5.

<sup>62</sup> TNA FO 371/163819, CS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1961, 24 January 1962, 4.

<sup>63</sup> TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1959, 12 March 1960, 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> TNA FO 371/174957, CS1201/1, MA's Report Spanish Army 1963, 8 January 1964, 7.

<sup>66</sup> This could not be easily overcome with a twenty per cent illiteracy rate among recruits, but efforts were taken to create a specialist corps with long-serving men to train them as technicians, signallers, or communication experts: TNA FO 371/153263, RS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1959, 12 March 1960, 3, 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1; TNA FO 371/169497, CS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1962, 15 January 1963, 6.

<sup>68</sup> TNA FO 371/160278, RS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1960, 10 February 1961, 5–8, 10–11; TNA FO 371/163819, CS1201/2, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1961, 24 January 1962, 4.

former entailed many crack units, which were based near major cities, which hinted at their actual duty: safeguarding internal order; but also obstructed the development of modern doctrines or the possibility of large-scale exercises.<sup>69</sup>

There was a modest improvement to British assessments in the 1940s and 1950s. These slightly positive remarks dwindled, however, as reforms led to little increased efficiency over time. The British MA saw two main reasons for this. First, despite the rise of modern open-minded mid-level officers who had benefitted from US schooling,<sup>70</sup> the officer corps remained seen as physically and mentally old. 'It is very rare to hear a General ever refer publicly to alertness or efficiency', the military attaché remarked, 'while phrases like military honour, discipline, etc., are liberally interspaced in their formal orations'.<sup>71</sup> Second, the 17-month conscription period was considered too short to train the mainly rural conscripts adequately in ever advancing technology.<sup>72</sup> In short, the British thought that Spain retained an oversized conscript army that could 'never fight a modern first-class war'.<sup>73</sup> The outdated material from the Civil War and American surplus equipment from the 1950s decreased in serviceability, which also affected the soldiers' morale.<sup>74</sup> The navy and air force were both familiar with this problem; the British snubbed the latter, considering that it 'never really began to compete with the sixties'.<sup>75</sup> Yet, both the navy and the air force were constantly thought to be 'less isolationist' than the army, due to their closer ties with foreign militaries.<sup>76</sup>

### After Franco: 1975 to early 1980s

Franco's death in November 1975 initiated a transitional period with many uncertainties. The army lost its status as Praetorian Guard without attaining a well-defined new role — which made the middle-class officers adopt a conservative stance of risk reduction.<sup>77</sup> There were additional traumatic changes: the Communist party was legalised and terrorism and separatism threatened the country's unity and public order, while the soldiers suffered from economic hardships.<sup>78</sup> The frustration about opening up to the left and the perceived weak response to ETA were major factors leading to the 23 February 1981 coup.<sup>79</sup> Hereafter, the British recorded for the first time how soldiers willingly discussed

<sup>69</sup> Reinlein, 36.

<sup>70</sup> This positive influence also held true for the other service branches: TNA FCO 9/1297, Annex B to DA, 9 February 1970, Annual Report Spanish Navy 1969, 4.

<sup>71</sup> TNA FO 371/169497, CS1201/1, MA's Annual Report Spanish Army 1962, 15 January 1963, 9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> TNA FCO 9/1297, Sir John Russell (Madrid) to FO, 10.6.1970, 2.

<sup>74</sup> TNA FCO 9/1297, Annex A to DA, 9 February 1970, MA's Annual Report 1969, 7.

<sup>75</sup> TNA FCO 9/1297, Annex C to DA, 9 February 1970, Annual Report Spanish Air Force 1969, 11.

<sup>76</sup> TNA FCO 9/1297, The Political Influence of the Spanish Armed Forces, 12 June 1970, 2.

<sup>77</sup> J. Fernández López, *El rey y otros militares. Los militares en el cambio de régimen político en España (1969-1982)* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 259.

<sup>78</sup> The army frequently referred to its constitutional duty to uphold order and territorial integrity. The military condemned the 'soft-glove' approach *vis-à-vis* ETA terrorism. In 1979 alone ten active and two retired generals were killed: Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 175, 193.

<sup>79</sup> For background on the coup: Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, 196ff; and Reinlein, 247ff.

politics and abandoned the hitherto existing apolitical dictum. The reinstated King Juan Carlos embodied continuity and remained vital to keep the armed forces on a democratic path,<sup>80</sup> since ‘promotion of reactionary officers opposed to the government continued’.<sup>81</sup> In fact, British observers thought the immediate post-Franco governments had ‘little impact on the thinking of service officers’.<sup>82</sup> The junior officers were thought to be a possible hotbed for uproar and possibly even another coup,<sup>83</sup> and the navy was judged as ‘if anything, even more reactionary than the army’.<sup>84</sup> The majority of the army had realised that there was no societal backing for coups and thus slowly abandoned such ideas.<sup>85</sup> Hence, given this split, it is questionable to what extent a mere generational change can account for a mentality adjustment within the military.<sup>86</sup>

The well-publicised Tejero trial was a humiliation for the military. The fact that respected generals were tried in court led even non-radical men to feel some sympathy for the accused and frustration about the army’s loss of public prestige.<sup>87</sup> Yet, one year later, the British believed the army had adjusted ‘surprisingly well to the new situation in Spain’<sup>88</sup> — not least thanks to the King’s role, the Socialist government’s firm line against terrorism, and their embarkation on a ‘massive program of military modernisation, consolidating Spain’s membership of NATO and replacing the Spanish army’s obsession with domestic politics by a concern for international strategic issues’.<sup>89</sup> The British also noted the irony that it was a Socialist government that initiated the badly needed reforms.<sup>90</sup>

## NATO as an opportunity?

The British Defence Attaché hoped that ‘NATO entry will give the army the challenge it needs to modernise effectively its organisation, tactical doctrine and operational procedures’,<sup>91</sup> and believed that it may well have a ‘therapeutic effect’.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>80</sup> P. Preston, *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 313–315, 397ff, 444ff.

<sup>81</sup> Olivas Osuna, 123.

<sup>82</sup> TNA FCO 9/2662, The Spanish Armed Forces in Politics since the Death of General Franco, 31 May 1977, 1.

<sup>83</sup> TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual and Valedictory Report 1981, 1 December 1981, 1–2.

<sup>84</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Military, 13 July 1983, 3.

<sup>85</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, Defence Attaché’s Annual Report 1982, 15 December 1982, 2. The same held true for the political ultra-right: Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 161–9.

<sup>86</sup> Most of the army commanders down to battalion level in the 1970s were still Civil War or Blue Division veterans, like Álvaro Lacalle Leloup, Chief of Defence Staff in 1982, the year Spain joined NATO. Thus, they only knew Franco as undisputed *Generalissimo* and not as rising general amongst others: Busquets, 106ff.

<sup>87</sup> TNA FCO 9/3642, Trial of the 23F Plotters, 6 April 1982.

<sup>88</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Military, 18 August 1983.

<sup>89</sup> Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 171; Olivas Osuna, 126.

<sup>90</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, Spain – Future of the Armed Forces, 10 March 1983, 5. See also A. Viñas, ‘Spain and NATO: Internal Debate and External Changes’, in *NATO’s Southern Allies: Internal and External Challenges*, ed. by John Chipman (London: Routledge, 1988), 140–194, here 175ff.

<sup>91</sup> TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual and Valedictory Report 1981, 1 December 1981, 3.

<sup>92</sup> TNA FCO 9/3642, The Spanish Military and the 23 February Trials, 26 January 1982, 2.

But was the army willing to take this challenge? Was there a considerable improvement after the political chains were gone and was this ‘large and rambling’ organisation of 330,000 members really changing?

The British reports show a mixed picture. When the Spanish army joined NATO in 1982, it was still perceived as stuck in glorifying the Civil War, disinterested in the outside world, and detached from civil society.<sup>93</sup> To the British, the Spanish high command appeared to grasp the ‘golden opportunity’ for modernisation that NATO accession offered.<sup>94</sup> The navy was seen as the most ardent supporter, hoping for a return to naval greatness,<sup>95</sup> and a majority of air force officers appeared eager for competitive exercises within NATO.<sup>96</sup> Both the navy and the air force would have felt the impact of NATO membership sooner than the army; hence, also inter-service rivalry over resource allocations must not be overlooked as reason for the army’s opposition.<sup>97</sup> But there were deeper causes.

The senior leadership feared the deployment of Spanish forces under foreign command to central Europe, which made them favour a loose link to NATO similar to the French opt-out.<sup>98</sup> The British also noted a continuous concern that membership ‘would reveal humiliating inadequacies in their professional skills and organisation’.<sup>99</sup> In addition, the German Military Attaché in Madrid described this fear of professional exposure and criticised persistent shortcomings in training and independent leadership.<sup>100</sup> Yet, there was an ‘air of excitement’ among many officers, particularly the younger ones,<sup>101</sup> about a possible conversion from traditional domestic duties to becoming a part of Western security.<sup>102</sup>

The result was mixed: while the navy and, to a lesser extent, the air force, favoured NATO membership, there was notable scepticism in the army. According to the British the army remained:

woefully ignorant about the Alliance and the benefits of full integration into the military structure. NATO is viewed largely in terms of self-interest: added prestige, more jobs for the boys and better equipment on the one hand; and assistance in retaining the North African enclaves and recovering Gibraltar on the other.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>93</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Military, 13 July 1983, 1–2. On this and more generally on the wide gap between the military and civilian spheres: Busquets, 116, 209ff.

<sup>94</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, Spain – Armed Forces Day Celebrations 1983, 1 June 1983.

<sup>95</sup> TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual Report 1980, 31 March 1981, 3. This in turn also meant that they seemed reluctant to subordinate Spanish vessels and overvalued their own contribution, which would make them ‘awkward bedfellows’ in the eyes of the British Naval Attaché, quoted in TNA FCO 9/4234, Report Naval Attaché Madrid 1982, 15 December 1982, B3.

<sup>96</sup> TNA FCO 9/2661, MA’s Annual Report 1976, Annex C, Spanish Air Force 1976, 15 February 1977, 8.

<sup>97</sup> TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual and Valedictory Report 1981, 1 December 1981, 3. This point was supported in an interview with Admiral Liberal Lucini in 1987: Olivás Osuna, 257.

<sup>98</sup> TNA FCO 9/2662, Report on information received from US AMA, 26 October 1977.

<sup>99</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Military, 13 July 1983, 3–4.

<sup>100</sup> German Federal Archives, Military Archives (*Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv*) [hereafter BA/MA], BVD 1/1011, MA Madrid, Annual Report 1978, 5 February 1979, 3.

<sup>101</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, 1.

<sup>102</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, Defence Attaché’s Annual Report 1982, 15 December 1982, 9.

<sup>103</sup> TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Military, 13 July 1983, 3–4.

Despite joining NATO in May 1982, the Socialist government placed a hold on military integration after their electoral victory just six months later. After a referendum in 1986, the Spanish decided to opt out of the integrated military structure, which decelerated efforts to improve effectiveness and limited international training opportunities. However, beyond the *desire* to join NATO and the fear of exposing professional defects, was the Spanish army anywhere near NATO standards and seen as a valuable asset to the Alliance?

The starting situation was far from good. In 1977, even the most able formations – the armoured division, the parachute brigade, and the Legion – were not considered to be equipped at ‘acceptable NATO standards’.<sup>104</sup> However, the British acknowledged improvements in logistical capabilities, successful rejuvenating initiatives with a gradual increase of merit-based promotions,<sup>105</sup> new radio equipment, augmented mechanisation, well-equipped artillery, a reorganised army air corps and special operations regiments.<sup>106</sup> Despite possessing old equipment, maintenance was judged respectable, and the material as good in comparison to other NATO southern flank armies.<sup>107</sup> The Americans saw the make-do attitude in maintenance, repair and supply as unsustainable with the technologically complex equipment the Spanish armed forces would obtain.<sup>108</sup> In fact, the academic level and technical expertise of the Spanish army was astonishingly low. In 1983, only 468 out of 8890 officers held a first university degree, of which a mere 63 were in technical engineering, and the armed forces’ own institutes produced a far lower academic standard.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, the Spanish armed forces could not easily digest an increased influx of technologically advanced material.

Several other deficiencies persisted even a decade after Franco’s rule: the army was unable to clothe let alone arm all reservists; lacked engineering equipment and suffered from a cumbersome bureaucracy,<sup>110</sup> territorial deployment and unfit staff officers.<sup>111</sup> Officer and staff training remained ‘repetitive, dogmatic and too long’.<sup>112</sup> The same was thought of the pitiful and few NCOs,<sup>113</sup> who were thorough but too theoretically trained,<sup>114</sup> and had almost no experience as simple sol-

<sup>104</sup>TNA FCO 9/2662, Draft on ‘The Spanish Army’, 24 November 1977, 5.

<sup>105</sup>The Germans also lauded this development. BA/MA, BW4/1087, MA Madrid, Annual Report 1982, 10 February 1983, 4.

<sup>106</sup>TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, A2.

<sup>107</sup>TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual and Valedictory Report 1981, 1 December 1981, 3.

<sup>108</sup>TNA FCO 9/2662, Final Report – US Assistant Military Attaché August 1977, 4 August 1977, 1.

<sup>109</sup>Busquets, 235, 237ff.

<sup>110</sup>Yet, the conservative and cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus has also been described as a structural reason for cohesion among the ground forces, being exposed to little changes: Olmeda Gómez, 144.

<sup>111</sup>The old idea of controlling the country in case of an uprising, had the result that the airborne brigade in Galicia was situated far away from a suitable air base: TNA FCO 9/3642, Form at a glance. Spain, 1 November 1982, 10.

<sup>112</sup>TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, A5.

<sup>113</sup>The Germans criticised the low number in comparison to the overall amount of officers: BA/MA, BW4/1087, MA Madrid, Annual Report 1982, 10 February 1983, 7.

<sup>114</sup>TNA FCO 9/2662, Draft, The Spanish Army, 24 November 1977, 3. For officers, the advancement from cadet to subaltern took five years. These were spent entirely at the Military Academy. The period for NCOs was four years: *ibid.*, 4.



diers, as more than half went directly to NCO school.<sup>115</sup> Despite some drug problems and bad pay for junior officers, the men still possessed great respect for their superiors and an ‘almost subservient discipline’.<sup>116</sup> German observers were appalled that a concept similar to their ‘*Innere Führung*’<sup>117</sup> was unknown to the Spanish army, where the rank-and-file was formed ‘with Spartan simplicity to rigid, formal discipline and almost unconditional obedience’.<sup>118</sup> While the Germans had their own experience with re-educating their soldiers after the Second World War, the British also repeatedly noted this malaise, as it discouraged initiative and caused ‘soldiers and NCOs to have a more dependent attitude than is found in North European armies. Officers tend to avoid decisions, expecting them to come from above’.<sup>119</sup> This culture of rigidity thwarted mentality changes and prevented operational flexibility, as initiative in the field — and at the desk — were unlikely to develop in such a hostile intellectual environment. Without any clear goal for the army or modern operational doctrine, the British pointed out that this restricted ‘realism and initiative in developing training programmes beyond a certain routine level’.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, Spain only devoted 0.15% of its territory to training areas, compared to Britain’s 0.58% and France’s 0.25%, which all too often resulted in low level and small formation training.<sup>121</sup> The distant training centres near Zaragoza and Albacete were far away from the territorially dislocated forces, which made it expensive to move equipment and men, and so each garrison used its own small training area of up to five square kilometres.<sup>122</sup> The armoured forces and artillery had little opportunity for live fire exercises and never trained as a complete formation. The infantry, however, had different problems, particularly those units based in the exclaves.<sup>123</sup> During combined exercises with French and Portuguese formations, even the elite parachute brigade ‘insist[ed] on being put in the reserve after two days of exercise, as their administrative and logistic organisation became exhausted’.<sup>124</sup> Even if funds were made available and manoeuvres held, they possessed little value. Realistic wartime simulations did not exist, and regular daily routine was followed during exercises, including the same breaks for meals and sleep. Logistic supply was not practiced and the battalion commanders were seldom tested;

<sup>115</sup>TNA FCO 9/3302, MA’s Annual Report 1980, 31 March 1981, 2.

<sup>116</sup>TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, A5. This was less the case if they came from urban centres, which around one third of the recruits did.

<sup>117</sup>An educational concept aiming at creating democratically minded ‘citizens in uniform’ that are deeply embedded in society and civilian values.

<sup>118</sup>BA/MA, BW4/1087, MA Madrid, Annual Report 1982, 10 February 1983, 7.

<sup>119</sup>TNA FCO 9/3642, Form at a glance. Spain, 1 November 1982, 27; TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual Report 1980, 31 March 1981, 6.

<sup>120</sup>TNA FCO 9/2661, MA’s Annual Report 1976, Annex A, 15 February 1977, 1.

<sup>121</sup>TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, A5.

<sup>122</sup>In total, only four training areas existed to host exercises above battalion level: TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual and Valedictory Report 1981, 1 December 1981, 7.

<sup>123</sup>TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, A4. Only the Legion regularly trained in Spain, hence the British remarked that ‘training above the Company level is, we believe, unknown’.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., A6.



they sat with the brigade staff ‘watching the systematic progression of the exercise having fulfilled their role by issuing elaborate written instructions’.<sup>125</sup>

A look at the navy or air force provides a comparably mixed picture. Paul Preston has argued that international contacts and exchanges promoted liberal ideas in the navy and air force, and the higher technological demands in these services had resulted in more sophistication (thus education), while the nature of their tasks brought less involvement in domestic duties (i.e. control and suppression of internal opponents).<sup>126</sup> Yet, sheer technological progress and international contacts did not advance operational effectiveness on its own.<sup>127</sup> The Germans concurred with the British view that in a service ranking, the navy would come first, followed by the air force, and ultimately the army; but, in 1982, all services were deemed of little combat value in contrast to those of ‘main NATO members’.<sup>128</sup> Thus, foreign observers estimated the reform process would take years to bring the Spanish armed forces materially and mentally up-to-date.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that this process took decades, as even the drastic reforms in the 2000s were still troubled by limited political will, financial means and a waste of resources.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1982, a British report concluded that ‘the Spanish army is aware that it is inefficient and backward, but tends to overlook the reasons for this. The major excuse is lack of resources and equipment’.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, the Spanish army was suffering from deeper-lying decade-old defects in its military and organisational culture, which seriously impeded its potential operational capabilities and any hypothetical innovation process. The main deficiencies lay in education and training of officers, the ‘tail’ services, and the absence of realistic large-scale combined arms exercises.

On the other hand, the British never considered willpower and morale as a problem. The high level of social prestige, provision of goods and services, and a guaranteed job helped. The officer corps remained a closed circle, but despite minor dissent, the junior-officer-to-men relations were not seen as delicate; the British never doubted that the Spanish soldier would fight courageously. Indeed, the Spanish tactical and operational performance in the Ifni War was judged somewhat positively. Certainly, the British (and German) assessments cannot provide an all-encompassing picture or hold absolute truth, yet they offer a vital outside view on problems that Spanish documents might not cover or willingly overlook. In conclusion, one can assess that reform attempts through an outside impetus failed, reforms after the Ifni War failed, and reforms immediately after Franco’s death

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., A4.

<sup>126</sup>Preston, *The Politics of Revenge*, 177.

<sup>127</sup>See e.g. TNA FCO 9/3302, Defence Attaché’s Annual and Valedictory Report 1981, 1 December 1981, 3 for the navy and TNA FCO 9/4234, Air Attaché Madrid 1982 Report, 15 December 1982, C1 for the air force which was described herein as ‘considerably below that of NATO air force standards’.

<sup>128</sup>BA/MA, BW4/1087, MA Madrid, Annual Report 1982, 10 February 1983, 11.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>130</sup>Guillem Colom Piella, ‘Transforming the Spanish Military’, *Defence Studies*, 16 (2016), 1–19.

<sup>131</sup>TNA FCO 9/4234, The Spanish Army 1982, 15 December 1982, A6.

failed. Or, as the British noted: ‘Change is always just around the corner, but for the Spanish armed forces the corner must appear a deadly distance away’.<sup>132</sup> Without an imminent outside threat or domestic political will for change, foreign stimuli and the small side-lined group of maverick officers were destined to fail in reforming the Spanish army’s effectiveness and culture. The Spanish case shows the difficulties and time required for thorough organisational transformation — even when international cooperation and domestic changes contribute to a positive development, as was the case in Spain in the 1980s.

Obviously, the Spanish army had suffered from material, political and financial limitations, but the military was never able to convert the existing means more efficiently into capabilities. Given the whole organisation’s ‘cultural lag’, it is unlikely that more resources and material would have increased the operational and tactical effectiveness notably — there simply was no culture of learning, no promotion of independent thinking, and no initiative in operational roles. Even if one accepts the argument that the army’s main duty was upholding domestic order, this would not preclude operational effectiveness and fighting capabilities. Such malaise was not restricted to the Spanish army (and society). Kenneth Pollack has described similar problems in Arab armies and a comparison to NATO southern flank armies or other dictatorial regimes would be fruitful. This article has also shown that the seeds of Spanish ineffectiveness had been sown in peacetime.<sup>133</sup> After the Second World War, drastic cuts lessened operational capabilities in numerous armies, as the Americans bitterly experienced in the opening stages of the Korean War — not to speak of most European armies’ decline into obscurity. Even contemporary examples have demonstrated how quickly US-trained and equipped armies can collapse, due to lack of cohesion and motivation, or poor operational and tactical effectiveness. Thus, more historical research should provide comparisons about how military assistance and peacetime modernisation of organisational cultures is best undertaken to augment battlefield performances.

## Notes on contributor

Bastian Matteo Scianna is a Lecturer in War Studies at the University of Potsdam. He recently completed his Ph.D., entitled ‘Myths and Memories: The Italian Operations on the Eastern Front (1941–1943) and their contested legacies during the Cold War’, after receiving his Masters from Columbia University and the London School of Economics (LSE).

Correspondence to: Bastian Matteo Scianna. Email: [scianna@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:scianna@uni-potsdam.de)

<sup>132</sup>TNA FCO 9/1297, Defence Attaché’s Report, 2 March 1970, 1.

<sup>133</sup>K. M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska UP, 2002).