

**Rafael Torres Sánchez.** *Military Entrepreneurs and the Spanish Contractor State in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xvii + 297 pp. \$100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-878411-1.

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In *Military Entrepreneurs and the Spanish Contractor State in the Eighteenth Century*, Rafael Torres Sánchez presents a masterful analysis of the relationship between the Spanish state and the acquisition systems that provided Spain with the means for war in the eighteenth century. Sánchez begins his argument by deftly describing the state of play of the historiography of the period. The classic view of the relationship of the period “highlights the state’s role as the main agent, unilaterally exerting all its coercive clout on its own society to obtain the military resources it needed” (p. 5). Through this lens of analysis, the answers in the scholarship have tended to highlight the growing power of the state or the waning power of the state and, according to Sánchez, are insufficient to describe economic and military outcomes. Sánchez highlights the transition of the current scholarship, which focuses less on state power and more on the arrangements states forged with outside entities to supply their war-making needs. Then he lays out his own framework to examine how much control the Spanish state was willing to cede in the relationship between *administración* (work done by the state) and *asiento* (work completed by private contractors). Through this relationship, Sánchez seeks to describe whether or not the system in place was sufficient to supply the needs of war.

Sánchez gives a detailed analysis of both *asiento* and *administración* in supplying the army and navy. His documentation of the rise and fall of *asiento* through the century is a fascinating section of his analysis. For example, the powerful merchant Francisco Mendineuta nearly monopolized the victualling of the Spanish Army. By mid-century, he was able to raise his asking price more than 53 percent from 1744 to 1749. Only five years later, his onerous prices and a change of the political situation in Madrid caused the Crown to loosen competition within the sector, and by 1763 Mendineuta was too far in debt to compete in the victualling market.

Although in Mendineuta’s case, the Spanish state loosened restrictions to increase competition and lower prices, in other cases Spain chose to take back control of the arrangement and produce its own goods via *administración*. The strongest example of state control was in the development of shipyards and cannons in which Spain chose a “privileged shipyard policy” (p. 159). Sánchez details the dominance of the state in the construction of ships, especially after 1750, and the ensuing difficulties, which state control posed for prices and output.

Through his work, Sánchez concludes that Spain switched from *administración* to *asiento* as needed based on timeliness, quality, and price of

goods. Thus his analysis further draws the broader historiography away from the lens of state control and more toward the relationships between states and private industry that charted the course for war production. Sánchez gives both *administración* and the *asiento* systems a fair analysis, but in his final chapter he comes down clearly on the superiority of commercial enterprise to supply war. Through an examination of the Spanish invasion of Minorca in 1781 and 1782, Sánchez forcefully illustrates the inability of the Spanish state to supply its own troops and the inhabitants of the island during the conflict. In fact, the Spanish military so ruined the food situation on Minorca after their initial landing in 1781 that the contractor state had to step in to save the day and feed the Spanish Army. Spanish official Pedro Lopez de Lerana broke the state monopoly on supply in December 1781 and the commercial market with “local merchants themselves, now unfettered, [who] managed to improve the supply situation and bring down its cost” (p. 229).

This conclusion is striking, has broad implications, and is provocative in the present context. Western militaries, even in the twenty-first century, rely heavily on military monopolies and supply, which are walled off from commercial competition. The thinking behind this arrangement holds that commercial activity cannot be relied on during war, and thus the military must keep extra stocks in reserve. Although Sánchez presents only one case study, he provides much food for thought regarding the effectiveness of state control of the system of supply. Future expansion into other case studies, and possible crossing boundaries into other states, most notably Britain and France, would further expand the scholarship and Sánchez’s thesis.

The humble title of the book belies a tour de force of historiography, analysis, and argument. The relationships between states, business, and war and Sánchez’s conclusion apply as much in the present day as they did for Spain in the eigh-

teenth century. For any student of relationships between the state, politics, and economy in war, this book is a must read.

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