

**TITOLO/TITLE:** Counterrevolution and Crisis in West Asia and North Africa (WANA)

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S:** BLANCA CAMPS-FEBRER & TIMOTHY E. KALDAS

**ACCEPTED LANGUAGES IN THE PANEL:** ENGLISH, ITALIAN, FRENCH

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

It is widely believed that the uprisings that began in late 2010 throughout West Asia and North Africa (WANA) are responsible for the widespread turmoil in the region. However, could the efforts to repress those uprisings better explain the subsequent deepening of crises throughout the region? In countries which have experienced uprisings as well as in other countries where regimes fear political contestation, ruling elites have undertaken an array of counterrevolutionary practices that have fueled elevated levels of violence, repression, poverty, and displacement.

The elaborate lengths political regimes go to in order to retain their grip on power offer a structural explanation for the persistent state of crisis experienced throughout much of the region. This reading of the past decade is at odds with other analyses that seek to explain regional crises as extensions of essentialist “age-old hatreds” or a justification for theories of authoritarian stability. Rather, the authoritarian coping mechanisms in response to elevated threats of revolution may better explain the ongoing crises the region is witnessing.

Many of these counterrevolutionary practices have been damaging to the countries these regimes preside over, and predictably so. Nonetheless, they continue to be pursued reflective of what Bichler and Nitzan (2018) conceptualized as a struggle for relative power accumulation. They contend that in a power competition, actors can move to sabotage their rivals even if it means fewer absolute resources for all of them, provided that the rival’s share of power is more severely damaged and reduced in relative terms.

The sabotage strategy can affect the relative share of power of rival actors specifically, but it can also directly harm the interests of the general public. One example is the scorched earth strategy practiced by Bashar Al Assad’s regime in Syria, which has caused a protracted and devastating civil war. In Lebanon, elite competition and efforts to stymie the Lebanese uprising have led to a paralyzing economic crisis and the wholesale collapse of the local economy, leaving 78% of Lebanese living below the poverty line, up from 28% in 2018.

Examples of Counterrevolutionary Practices that contribute to crisis include but are not limited to

- 1) **Counterrevolutionary Capital:** The deployment of capital through political economic strategies designed to expand regime control over the market and ensure widespread dependence and loyalty of private sector actors on the regime while expanding the market share of regime owned enterprises. While effective at weakening potential rivals, these practices in Egypt have deterred investment, slowed economic growth and job creation while poverty rises.

- 2) **Counterrevolutionary Securitization:** Under the narrative of counter-terrorism, regimes have increased the deployment of security measures against opposing groups as well as to monitor the general population. Invasive surveillance practices against activists and critics have been legitimized by the 'threat of terrorism' and instability, while regimes normalized exceptional executive and discretionary powers. Charges of terrorism have been deployed against critics to justify mass imprisonment and even massacres of protestors. In the name of counterterrorism competition, regimes have been able to secure external funding and support while quieting criticism of widespread and destabilizing practices of repression.
- 3) **Counterrevolutionary Violence:** Counterrevolutionary securitization can also be taken to greater extremes to justify direct violence. Mass repression has been widely used by regimes in an effort to hold on to power and deter challengers resulting, at times, in open armed conflicts, widespread insecurity in the region, and severe humanitarian crises. This can be seen in a number of countries to varying extents. One of the most extreme examples is Syria, where Bashar Al Assad has overseen a massive military campaign to put down an uprising against his regime that has left hundreds of thousands dead, and over ten million Syrians displaced.
- 4) **Counterrevolutionary Foreign Policy:** In the past decade there has been an expansion of regional powers deploying power across their borders. While regional powers have long used capital to influence events and bolster allies, there is an increased willingness to deploy military power alongside capital to protect existing autocracies and establish/reestablish others. The UAE, which has not experienced an uprising domestically, has nonetheless aggressively expanded its counterrevolutionary foreign policy giving economic and military support to autocratic allies while participating in the direct intervention in Yemen.

While many of these practices are features of power competition more broadly, the recent threat of revolution has led to an intensification of these practices as regimes see more internal and external threats against their survival. This perspective suggests that research focusing on counterrevolutionary practices can better elucidate the driving causes of crises in WANA.

This panel seeks to explore how counterrevolutionary measures are pivotal drivers for crisis as they increase regional instability and social, economic and humanitarian crises. We welcome papers discussing regime survival strategies and their impact. Papers should focus specifically on how these practices and strategies structure the array of crises facing WANA populations.

#### PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Blanca Camps-Febrer is a PhD Fellow at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She is an active member of the Research Group IRWANA ([www.irmena.net](http://www.irmena.net)) as well as the Center Delàs for Peace Studies ([www.centredelas.org/](http://www.centredelas.org/)). She has been a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (Harvard University) and at the Centre Jacques Berque Rabat (IFRE-CNRS). She has worked for civil society groups in the region, on international development and human rights issues. A Political Scientist and Masters in International Relations, Security and Development, her research is mainly situated within critical security studies, transnationalism, and feminist studies in Northern Africa and West Asia.  
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MA thesis examined the colonial roots of discrimination against French Muslims. His research currently focuses on the Political Economy and Foreign Policy of Egypt.  
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