

***Foreign Policy and the Institutional Evolution of  
Rojavayê Kurdistan (2011–Present)***

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This policy paper examines the evolution of Rojavayê Kurdistan [Western Kurdistan – commonly referred to as (Democratic Self-Governance of) Rojava] from 2011 to the present, analysing how successive phases of the Syrian conflict shaped its institutional development. It argues that Rojava's survival and consolidation have been driven primarily by external engagement, rather than by religion or ideological doctrine. Drawing on primary sources, including interviews with central figures and significant contributors, such as Mazloun Abdi, Kino Gabriel, and Alan Semo, the paper demonstrates how Rojava's military, political, and administrative institutions emerged in response to regional and international pressures.

Unlike the interim administration, where religion serves as a central source of political legitimacy and external alignment, Rojava's governance model institutionalises a clear separation between religion and politics while employing religion as a unifying social and communal force. The analysis situates Rojava within a broader typology of states-to-be, illustrating how non-state actors can and do exercise foreign policy agency to secure survival, consolidate autonomy, and shape regional dynamics under conditions of conflict and contested sovereignty.

This study advances the literature by highlighting the greater significance of foreign policy in the institutionalisation of Rojava's established administration. By tracing the interaction between foreign policy engagement and institutional evolution, the paper highlights the distinctiveness of Rojava's model and contrasts it with competing governance structures in Syria. It argues for the greater significance of foreign policy in institutional consolidation, advancing an interpretation that departs from the dominant literature on non-state governance.

*More Information*

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