

The Rojava Revolution

Co-operation, Environmentalism, and Feminism in
the North Syria Democratic Federation

Why Rojava... why now?

1. Need for a new imaginary
2. Need to apply our co-operative and social values and principles to scales of comprehensive systemic change
3. Need to learn the lessons of vanguard movements – sometimes in the unlikely places.





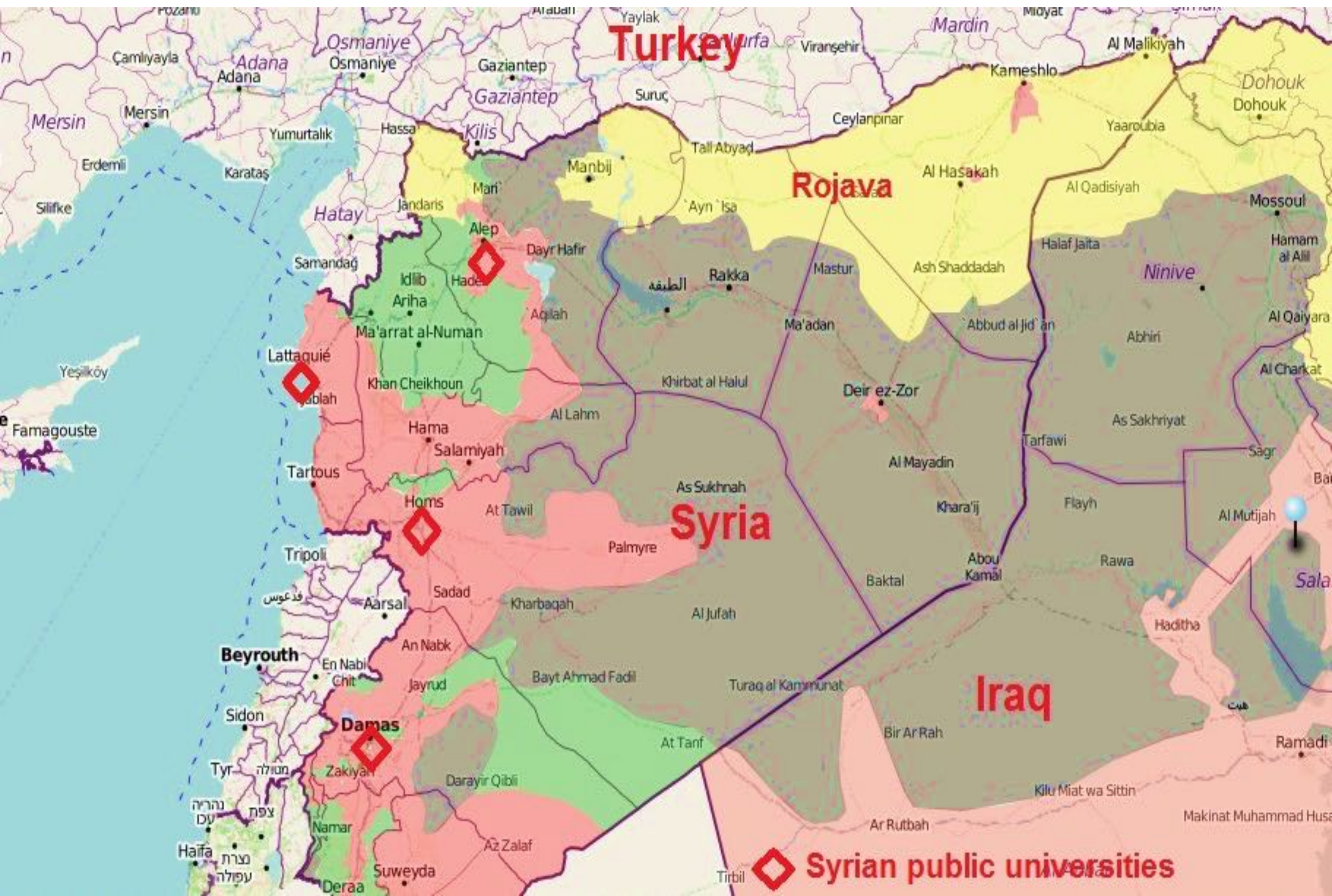


This is not all there is to what is happening in Syria....

The revolution that is taking place in Rojava is a unique movement of hope and healing.









Background

- Syrian conflict broke out in March 2011, when schoolboys in Deraa were arrested and tortured for writing anti-Assad graffiti.
- What began as a peaceful, pro-democracy uprising, degenerated into an armed conflict when Assad forces responded with brutal repression & armed force.

- Today Syria has become a battlefield for a proxy war among diverse interests. “Terrorists” are mostly militias funded & supported by neighboring states: Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar
- The Assad regime supported by Russia, Iran
- Kurds are among the various ethnic groups caught up in the conflict.

- With the retreat of Assad military forces from northern Syria, the Kurds in Rojava establish People's Protection Units (YPG & YPJ) and secure Rojava and Kobani as autonomous territories.
- ISIS is pushed out of the region and the Rojava forces establish a model of political economy based on communitarian direct democracy.
- This is called Democratic Confederalism.
- The aim of Democratic Confederalism is to realize a form of political economy they call *stateless democracy*.

Democratic Self Government entails:

- a) Rejection of the nation state as inherently repressive
- b) Direct democracy based on communal councils
- c) Federated and autonomous self-governing territories
- d) Inclusivity of all religious and ethnic groups
- e) Gender equality
- f) Co-operative economics
- g) Participatory politics

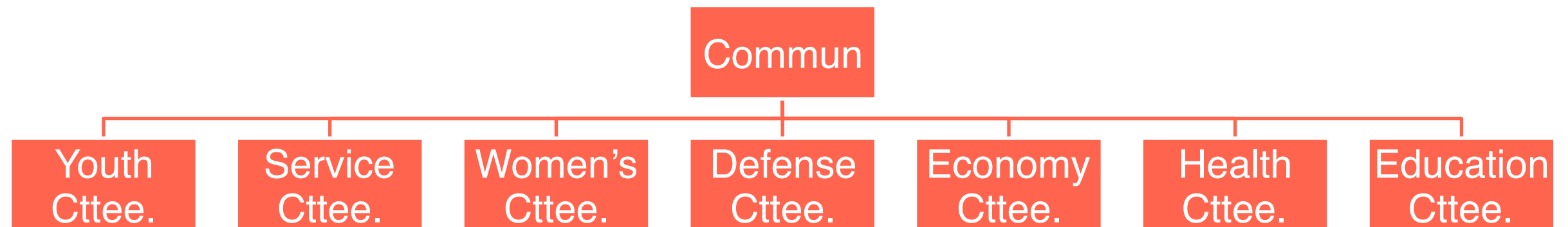
Co-operative Economy & Democratic Confederatism

1. Rojava's political economy is based on the principle of direct democracy as the organizing basis for both economics and politics.
2. The foundation for this is communal control of both economic and political life.
3. Rojava is a unique instance of community directed democracy acting as the link between the organization of the economy and the organization of political life as an integrated system.

Co-operative Economy & Democratic Confederation

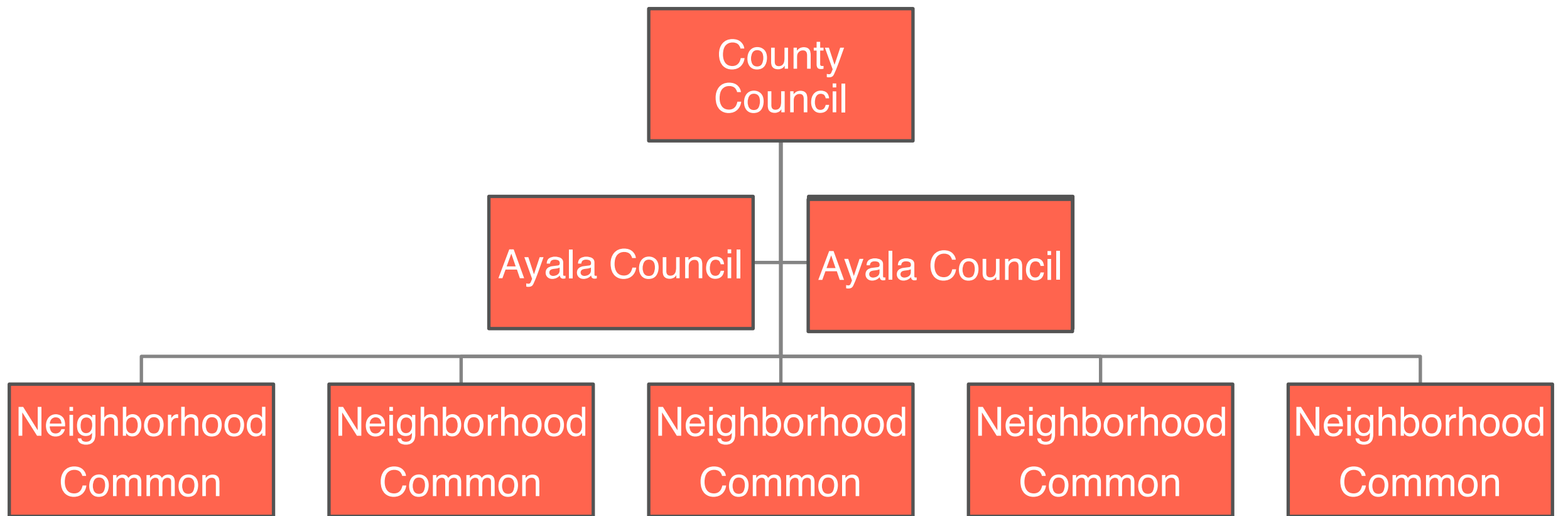
Co-ops & self-directed community councils were a means of doing this. They are the foundation of the system.

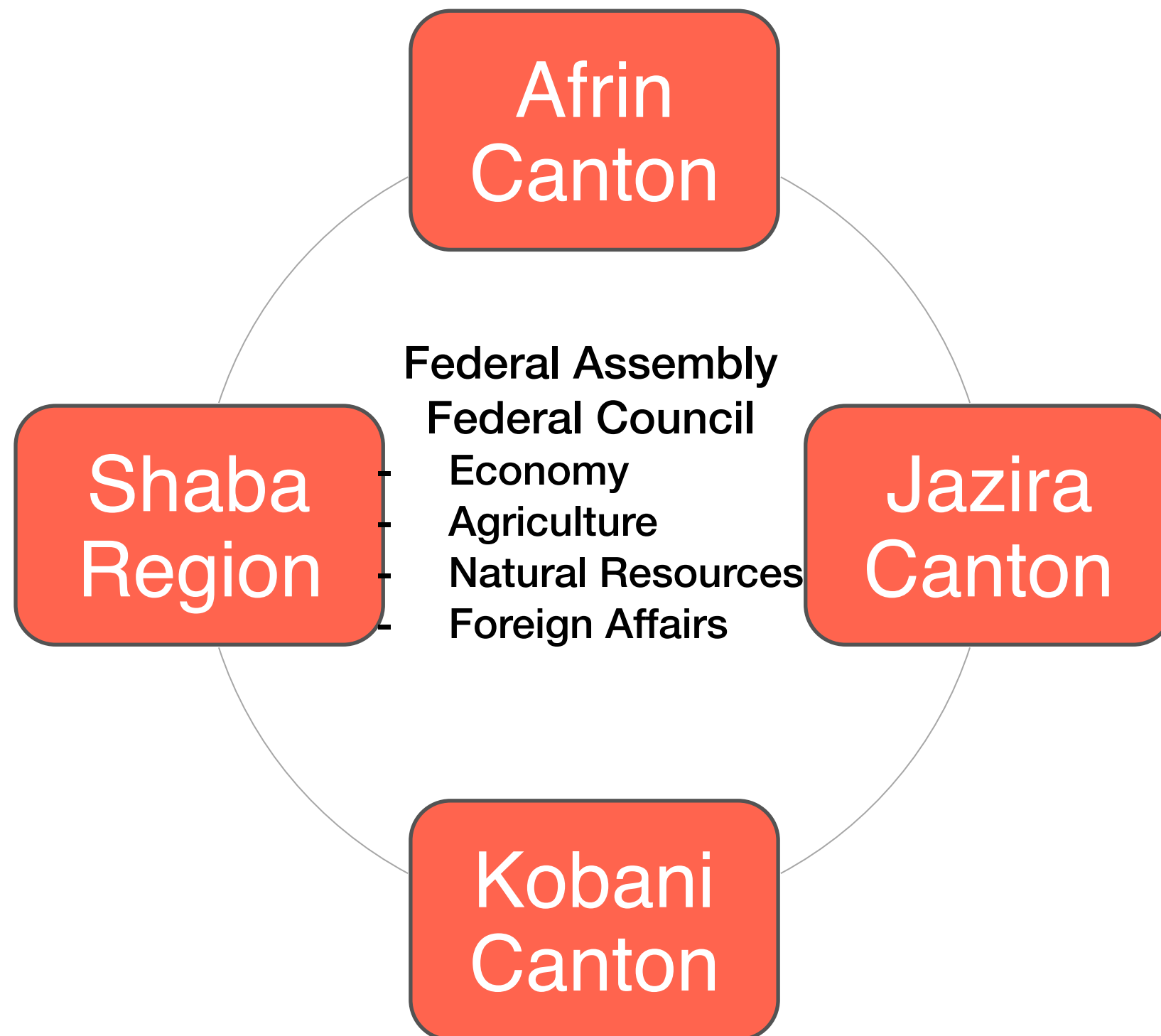
Commune System



*Neighborhood
Council*







Co-operative Organization

- Communes are the means by which civil society addresses collective issues at neighborhood, local, regional, and district levels.
- Co-operatives are the organizational form used to put collective solutions into practice.
- These are some examples...



Lorin Women's Food
Co-op





Kasrik Agricultural Co-op











Hevgirtin (Solidarity) Co-op

Integral Approach

- CED – Territorial, community-driven development
- Co-operative – Economic Democracy
- Democratic Self-Government – Communal Direct Democracy

All three methodologies are integrated within a single comprehensive vision of systemic change.

The model here is civil organizations directing development – TEVDEM, Kongreya Star, federated communes

The Rojava founding council passed four declarations with respect to its management system Rojava.

- 60 percent of representatives in the national parliament will be elected directly by voters through ballot boxes.
- 40 percent of the parliament's seats will be reserved for minorities via a quota system.
- There must be equal participation of men and women.
- Each member of the parliament and the councils is entitled to run for elections for two terms.

New Developments

1. Defeat of ISIS in Syria; liberation of Raqqa
2. Referendum in Kurdistan Region of Iraq; Political brinksmanship of Masoud Barzani
3. Embargo agreement between Iran, Iraq, Turkey
4. Invasion of Afrin by Turkey



AP Photo

Preconditions of Rojava's success (so far...)

1. The opening of a political space for revolution, occasioned by the Syrian conflict.
2. Solidarity of purpose occasioned by ethnic & cultural struggle & collective identity.
3. Clarity of vision & purpose facilitated by the power of Ocalan's ideas.
4. Organization of military capacity & the ability to defend achievements.
5. Correlation of co-operative ideas with traditional values & cultural practices.

Lessons

1. Comprehensive, large scale co-operative political economy is possible
2. Integrating economic with political democracy within a single system is crucial
3. Systems building from grass roots upward
4. Organizing civil institutions (TEVDEM, Kongra Star, Commons)
5. Plural & multi-interest institutions
6. Clear social, cultural, economic, & political vision
7. Comprehensive education & training – communal, political, institutional
8. Need for international solidarity

Lessons

Rojava encourages us to think big, to have hope, and to understand that alternatives exist... the paradigms we live in are not set in stone.

It is possible to build a democratic and co-operative political economy where peace, equality, and communities come first.

Risks

Internal

- Intolerance of dissent
- Emergence of competing influences from other actors (ethnic & religious minorities, political movements)
- Insufficient training & education of leadership
- Transition from war economy to sustainable “peace” economy

External

- Competition & conflict within broader Kurdish community (KDP)
- Reaction of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, to declaration of Kurdish independence in Iraq
- Turkey invasion of Afrin – threat to revolution in Rojava
- Increased dependence on US
- Increased influence of NGOs

The main point...

The model now implemented in Rojava shows a way to *humanize* our political economy by re-connecting social values to the marketplace, radically extending democratic practice, and mobilizing civil society to realize this vision.

Question: Is there any form of state that can catalyze and support this process? A Partner State...?

The Partner State

- The State as an *enabling state*.
- Its purpose: to facilitate the mobilization of civil society for the production of social goods in service to the common good. The co-ordination – not *control* – of collective action.
- The practice of *generative democracy*, as opposed to passive democracy. Citizenship as a *verb*, rather than a noun.
- The democratization of government, through the co-operatization of government operations & services.
- The creation of an equitable balance between state, civil, and commercial power.
- The promotion and institutionalization of co-operative economy and co-operative markets.

The Partner State

The experiment in stateless democracy taking place now in Rojava may be an emerging model for a co-operative Partner State...

Thank You

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