

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**AN ANALYSIS ON THE BEHAVIOR
OF SYRIA AS A STATE IN THE
2011 - 2016 SYRIAN CONFLICT
THROUGH THE KEY
ASSUMPTIONS OF REALISM**

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ABSTRACT

As Syria enters its seventh year of bloodshed and conflict that has seen numerous resolutions and foreign interventions, there is still no sign of it ending any time soon. In International Relations (IR), explanations from the perspective of Realism often emerge for the behavior and patterns of interaction among states during war and conflict. Therefore, this dissertation explores why Syria behaved the way it did during the first five years of the crisis—starting from the 2011 uprising—through the key assumptions of Realism. This study is motivated by two research questions: (1) How does Realism explain war and conflict? and (2) How does Realism and its key assumptions explain the behavior of Syria as a nation state during the first five years of the Syrian Conflict? The research questions are answered through in-depth content analysis as well as in-depth interviews with experienced IR personnel. Findings of the study show that the key assumptions of Realism are highly correlated with the state's behavior during conflict. This study aims to enhance further understanding of Realism and its key assumptions as an analytical tool to explore crucial events happening in international politics particularly on understanding the conflict in Syria. However, dependence on key assumptions only is not enough to analyze the behavior of Syria as a state. Adding a few other key concepts to the study could allow for further research in the future.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background of the study, with a particular focus on the realist views of Realism to explain how states work in an international system. It also offers a glimpse into the reasons for the ongoing conflict in Syria. Since the war began in 2011, efforts to intervene in Syria's conflict have not yet succeeded. Meetings after meetings in the United Nations have been met with failure with no result or positive outcomes. The background information on the study provided in this chapter will help us better understand Syria's behavior as a nation state in crisis through realist perspectives and assumptions.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In order to understand the current situation, one must be well acquainted with the past. With that in mind, past occurrences should be examined briefly. Realism has been the dominant theory in world politics since the beginning of academic International Relations because it provides the most powerful explanation for the state of war, which is the regular condition of life in the international system (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001). In general, a realist believes in power politics, where the state is considered the only rational actor in the international system and is constantly struggling for power. Thucydides (431-404 BC) in his writing *History of The Peloponnesian War* wrote that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Thucydides explains that war is inevitable. This shows that international politics is driven by an endless struggle for power, which is rooted in human nature. Hans Morgenthau (1948) in *Politics Among Nations* explained that war happens simply because of the human desire to dominate other humans, not because of political or ideological differences. He includes strong assumptions saying that humans are not naturally nice. Morgenthau tries to explain the occurrence of the Cold War by stating that the U.S. and Soviet Union rivalry was not because of differences