

# Literature Review: The Pacifism of *Metal Gear Solid*

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The *Metal Gear Solid* (MGS) series of video games directed by Hideo Kojima has had at least one release every decade since its first game, *Metal Gear* (1987), continuing into the 2020s with a release of the first five games. Scholars seem to agree that the games have a consistent anti-war theme (Stamenković et al., 2017; Kurniawan, 2020; Murray, 2018; Robinson, 2012; Hutchinson, 2019), although they do not all agree on how this is achieved. Some specialize in the persuasive element of this (Stamenković et al., 2017; Kurniawan, 2020), while others focus on politics (Murray, 2018; Robinson, 2012), both of which are well trodden angles of analysis. Less common is the inseparable impact of Hideo Kojima, the creator of *Metal Gear Solid*, on the franchise itself.

Stamenković et al. and Kurniawan, all experts in their fields, tended to emphasize the persuasive efforts of the series. Stamenković and his colleagues chose to focus on the discourse analysis of *Metal Gear Solid* (1998) and how persuasive it is by applying Kinneavy's Theory of Persuasion, which states that discourse has four main flavors, depending on what the goal of the work is (Warnock, 1978). Kurniawan, on the other hand, chooses to focus on the genre of *Metal Gear Solid V: the Phantom Pain*, and how that influences the narrative and persuasive aims of the game. Both Stamenković et al. and Kurniawan argue the importance of a multimodal construction in making a persuasive game, with Stamenković et al. focusing much more on the cutscenes (movie-like and non-interactive parts of a game). Some common ground is that they emphasize the importance of gameplay ideals matching that of the story. The core gameplay of the series has not changed since its inception with *Metal Gear* (1987) (Hutchinson, 2019). However, the games have become much more complex, with Kurniawan saying the following about the gameplay of *MGSV: The Phantom Pain*:

The genre bending of this video game is that this video game violates the nature of action-adventure video games which always emphasizes on violence and killings. However, the system-game play of this game demand the player of this video game not to kill enemy brutally because every enemy has potential ability to become the new recruits.

He goes on to mention the “heroism” system, which changes the appearance of the protagonist based on their actions. Killing enemies subtracts from the score and gives the protagonist horns and covers him in blood, which goes to further show the pacifist and anti-war nature of the game (Kurniawan, 2020). These writers emphasize how the game mechanics create the games’ effects.

Unlike Stamenković and Kurniawan, Murray and Robinson focused more on the politics around *Metal Gear Solid*. Murray, an associate professor at UC Santa Cruz, chooses to analyze *Metal Gear Solid* through its fifth and final game, *The Phantom Pain*. More specifically, she

focuses on the game's landscape of Soviet-occupied Afghanistan during the 1980s. Nick Robinson, associate professor at the University of Leeds, took a much broader look at the series and developed ideas similar to those of Kurniawan and Stamenković et al.: The gameplay of the series reinforces that of the anti-war narrative. However, he does this through the lens of political theory as opposed to discourse analysis and genre, with the greater goal of convincing other political theorists to take video games more seriously for the sway they have.

Rachael Hutchingson takes on a completely different lens from the others. A professor of Japanese studies at the University of Delaware, she speaks about the influence of film on Hideo Kojima, the director and creator of *Metal Gear Solid*. He was highly impactful in its art direction until his departure from the publisher in 2015; as such, his interest in film and the influence of his family's stories of atomic attacks (Hutchinson, 2019) both play a role in the direction of the series. Hutchinson says, "Kojima employed photographs, documentary film, and journalistic video footage in his game to create a specific impact on the player," which can be tied back to Stamenković et al. and their application of Kinneavy's Theory of Persuasion to *Metal Gear Solid* (1998).

Hutchinson's angle is one of the more underdeveloped areas with regards to scholarly conversation around *Metal Gear Solid*. Subsequent discussion could attempt to understand how Kojima's fascination with American culture and film has affected the series. Perhaps this could be done through a lens of politics or art direction, or themes across the series. The artist always has an impact on the art, especially in a franchise so politically charged as *Metal Gear Solid*; the only question is how much and how that takes shape. Until now, that question has been mostly neglected, and analysis on MGS could benefit from insight on the workings of the creator.

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## References

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