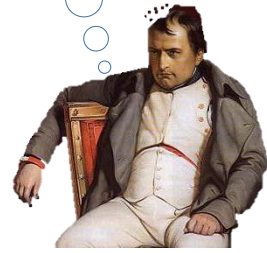


Mille Baionnetes:

A game of un-civil war

Forget bullets. Never mind the high terrain. When the control of your nation hangs in the balance, information is more powerful than one thousand bayonets. How will you use information to hang onto power...or seize it?

Napoleon Bonaparte, that battlefield genius, put information over firepower when he said: *“Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.”* Imagine the French Emperor’s horror today: your enemies can take to radio, TV, direct mail, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr and a welter of new publishing and broadcasting platforms. Shut down the internet, and mobile platforms like Twitter take over. What’s a national government to do to keep people’s support? What are the types of information that have, historically, been the most powerful?



Student teams are given 20 minutes meet and write their plan for using information to hold or seize power in one of two nations in turmoil. In the end, classmates choose which information strategy made the best use of the power of information.

Fredonia is ruled by a democratically elected legislative and executive branch. Over time, the government has grown corrupt and swollen with bureaucrats indifferent to the needs of any people other than their own cronies and mistresses. Elections are free and fair, but each elected reformer’s pledges dissolve once in office, as the perks of office and power of entrenched bureaucrats slow change until reformers start feasting at the public trough, rewarding cronies with government contracts and exemptions from regulation or scrutiny. By several quirks of the constitution and culture of Fredonia, the military is efficient, independent and merciless about punishing unethical behavior in its ranks. Fed up by the latest scandal, the military decides it is time for a coup and takes steps to prepare the people for a swift take-over by skilled managers. How will the military use information to take over? How will the democratically elected government use information to cling to power?

Sylvania is ruled by royal family. The queen and her sisters control all the major functions of government as well as all newspapers and TV and radio. The trains run on time. The streets are clean and safe. But bad things happen to the critics of the royal family: car accidents, brief and fatal illnesses, avalanches and surfboard collisions. And the few who have the freedom to travel whisper quietly of the brutal poverty outside the capital city. Farmers benefit little from the nation’s sought-after marijuana crop. Miners are paid barely enough to live, though they produce most of the world’s diamond supply. When government troops kill 20 young men during an attempted miners strike, farmers and miners walk off the job nationwide. From the chaos arises a network of rebels who aim to unseat the royals and replace them with a democratically elected parliament and prime minister. How will the Queen and her family use information to quell the rebellion? How will the rebels use information to build their movement?

Students count by fours and divide into teams: Fredonian Government; Fredonian Military; Sylvanian Monarchs; Sylvanian Rebels. Teams are given 15 minutes to devise their strategy and methods, using information to sway the public to their side.

Each team is then given two minutes to make its case to the whole class. After hearing all four presentations, the class picks the winning strategy for each country, leading to a discussion of questions such as:

- ✓ What was more important, the content or the distribution method? Why?
- ✓ How important will truthfulness be, compared to mass appeal of the information?
- ✓ Did the origin of the message matter, or was anonymity a strength?
- ✓ What did you notice about uses of humor, patriotism, music, images?
- ✓ What is the weakness of a tech-reliant method, as opposed to low-tech methods