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One of the time-tested strategies for winning any battle - military, political, or athletic - is the doctrine of diversion. The quarterback fakes a pass to the right, and then throws to the left.

The classic expression of this doctrine in military terms, some times attributed to a Chinese named Sun-Tzu, is: "Make a noise in the East, but strike in the West."

Among the many times that the Communists have used this ploy was the Berlin Blockade of 1948. While we strained for 17 months to fly in food and fuel, the Reds captured China.

The strategy of diversion still works. While we are absorbed with the fall of Vietnam, and emotionally involved with flying out the orphans, the Communists are quietly consolidating their control of Portugal.

Senator James Buckley calls this "the most profound crisis since the end of World War II," and adds that, "if Portugal is lost to the West, our Middle Eastern policies and goals become irrelevant, as we will be stripped of the power to implement them." Portugal was the only European nation that permitted our planes to refuel on their way to take essential military aid to Israel in the 1973 war.

A quick look at the map proves the vital importance of Portugal and her islands, the Madeiras and the Azores. If a Moscow-dominated Portugal remains in NATO, the Kremlin will soon have a seat in the secret councils of the Free World. If Portugal withdraws, the Soviets will have achieved one of their primary goals, the breakup of NATO.

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There are already rumblings that Portugal may be the springboard to another Communist coup in neighboring Spain.

The :::nan who engineered the coup in Portugal a year ago was certainly not a Communist. General Antonio de Spinola wanted his country to be democratic. But he made a fatal mistake. Today, General Spinola is in exile in Brazil, a sadder and a wiser man, now saying that, if he had it to do all over again, he certainly would not bring Communists into the government.

It is a pity that Spinola was so ignorant of the fate of all Communist coalition governments. wnat happened in Portugal was simply a replay of the takeover of Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia.

There is no question about the role of the Portuguese Communist Party in the present situation. It has always been totally subservient to the Kremlin, and even gave 100 percent support to the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Portuguese CP leader, Alvaro Cunhal, has spent much of the past 20 years in Prague, where he worked with the KGB and other Kremlin agents.

If the Communists succeed in taking over Portugal, the Soviet Navy will acquire bases that will render the Mediterranean untenable to the U.S. Sixth Fleet. Soviet submarines will double their on-station time because they will not have to return to Russian bases.

The Soviet Union, well aware of the stakes in Portugal, is sending at least $10 million per month in weapons and other aid to the Portuguese Communist Party. The Soviets are counting on the American people being too preoccupied with Vietnam, Henry Kissinger being too busy with shuttle diplomacy, and the CIA being too neutralized by investigations, to do anything about it.

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