The name Angola has become the newest word in many American's vocabulary. Angola is Africa's newest independent country, six million people in a mineral-rich territory twice the size of Texas. On the surface the war in Angola is an internal conflict in which African people are trying to hammer out the shape of their own political future. But, as we by now are well aware, the U.S. government (among others) is showing an increasingly strong interest in events there. We now know that for more than ten years the CIA has been channeling under-the-table aid to one of the factions in an attempt to influence the outcome of this struggle in a way presumably favorable to our own strategic interests. At the same time, U.S. provided strong support through NATO to Portugal in the colonial war against all liberation movements.

Increasingly Americans are raising legitimate questions about our role in Angola: what is our real stake in that country, if any? What do we stand to gain or lose if one faction rather than another wins control? How is it that we have been giving support to one of the parties (FNLA = National Front) without being made aware of this role or its justification? More to the point: What are the chances that our present involvement in Angola could become a "new Vietnam"? And finally, if it could, how can we bow out gracefully before it reaches these proportions?

Our stake in Angola is usually defended in terms of the age-old "need" to contain communist expansion in the world. Since the faction we are opposing (MPLA-Popular Front) is receiving support from socialist and Third World countries, our role is "necessary" to protect the establishment of a red beachhead in Africa. In Kissinger's words, we are thwarting Russian attempts to re-colonize Africa.

This argument has several flaws. It assumes that since the Soviets are aiding MPLA, if this faction emerges the victor, it will be willing to compromise its sovereignty and grant major concessions to the USSR (eg. exclusive commercial rights, ...
military bases, unqualified support for USSR's foreign policy). This is said in spite of the fact that there are no Soviet colonies in Africa and the firm statement made by the Popular Movement that it will never sacrifice the fruits of its 400 year struggle against European colonialism by submitting to the domination of yet another foreign power. Since the 16th century Angolans have actively resisted Portuguese colonial rule, which was imposed on them against their will through the force of arms. It is highly improbable that they would in any sense permit 'colonization' by the USSR simply out of gratitude for military aid (This is like arguing that the U.S.A. would have agreed to become a colony of France since it was so helpful during our Revolutionary War).

Secondly, the real stake which the U.S. does have in Angola is economic. The country has vast mineral resources in the form of diamonds, iron, and (most importantly) oil. Gulf oil's concessions in northwest Angola (Cabinda) is our most important investment and has been a major factor in our long support of the Portuguese, who controlled the territory through 1974. Just as Portuguese relations with multinational corporations were very favorable, the National Front (which we are backing) is seen as the most favorably inclined toward U.S. corporate investment of the three factions.

Here the Kissinger policy is based on the underlying premise, 'What's good for Gulf oil is good for the U.S.A.' But even this is questionable, since Gulf continued operations in Cabinda until last week, even though it was controlled by the Popular Movement.

The Administration would have us believe that our involvement in Angola is a defensive reaction to thwart the Soviet influence in the area. In reality, U.S. involvement in Angola has a much longer history and is rooted in our long standing, covert commitment to support Portuguese colonialism there. Through NATO, Portugal received U.S. arms to control Angolan freedom fighters. Portuguese pilots trained in the U.S. dropped American napalm on Angolan villages. Gradually, as some form of independence for Angola seemed inevitable, we shifted support to the group which seemed least bent on changing the status quo. Support for
the FENAs is thus a continuation of the same basic policy.

The administration is highly embarrassed by the exposure of its history of involvement in Angola because it is rooted in interests directly opposed to those of the African people. It contradicts our verbal support for African liberation and our pious condemnation of the white racist regime in Southern Africa. Now it is clear that in backing the National Front, we are allied with South Africa. In so doing we are in effect saying that no matter how deplorable the racist regime of South Africa, it is less objectionable than the USSR. The independent countries of Africa are quick to read this message and many now recognize MPLA as the legitimate government and defender against south African expansion. They see the U.S. as supporting this expansion.

It is here that we see potential for large scale military involvement at least as far reaching as that in Vietnam. U.S. investment in South Africa is considerable. Our intervention in Angola may well be the beginning of a full-scale involvement in a wider struggle to preserve the structure of white power in South Africa, Namibia, and neighboring Rhodesia. Here again the Indochinese domino theory will be invoked to justify our action.

We see many other parallels to Vietnam in our present role in Angola. As in Vietnam, we are moving in to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of a colonial power. As in Vietnam we are hoping to influence events indirectly through the provision of aid, advisors, etc.—equipping and training those who seem most willing to defend our own economic and political self-interest. Most of the killing and dying will involve Africans, which will minimize criticism here at home.

But already there are signs of even deeper involvement. Americans are now being recruited to serve as mercenaries in the Angolan conflict. (It is illegal for U.S. citizens to serve in a foreign army.) Just as in Vietnam, American
lives lost in Angola will become the justification for committing even more resources and more lives.

It is our belief that the time to avoid such an escalation is now - before it becomes impossible to reverse. Will we do our utmost to avoid this course or will Angola be yet another example to prove that a nation learns nothing from its own history?

(This suggested brief introduction can well be augmented by the speaker, especially utilizing points of interest to the specific audience.)