Wright Disputes Legality Of U.S. Intervention In Viet Nam Conflict
By GARY SHAPIRO

"The action taken by the United States following an alleged attack on a U.S. destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin was wholly illegal and went out of proportion to the damage suffered." Dr. Quincy Wright, Wellesgan:

visiting professor of international law at Rice, spoke on the legal aspects of America's involvement in Vietnam Tuesday evening in the Hanszen Commons outlining the case for and against the United States' level of commitment there.

"Reprisal was, in itself, an outrageous action and one which put the United States in the position of being considered the aggressor." Dr. Wright suggested that in terms of international law the military actions of the U.S. might be considered illegal for two reasons.

Civil War
First, since it was President Diem and the United States who refused to participate in the elections guaranteed by the Geneva Convention in 1954, the purpose of which was to unite the country, the separation of the two Viet Nams in de facto and de jure form is not, in determining legal.

Therefore, the war is one of "civil strife" and is analogous to the Civil War of the United States, and America's participation in it is a meddling in the internal affairs of a single country.

Second, the congressional resolution which permitted the President to answer in kind to the Gulf of Tonkin attack failed to recognize that there was no actual damage done to the destroyer attacked and, therefore, the U.S. was given no legal justification to retaliate against reprisals against North Vietnamese ports.

Truman Doctrine
Dr. Wright also noted that the idea of containing the spread of communism is based largely on the Truman Doctrine, which is "contrary to international law and ought to be abandoned." In the light of current developments, however, he sees little possibility for the abandonment of the United States' present policy and feels that "prospects are that President Johnson will move more toward the hawks than the doves."

In explaining the United States' presence in Vietnam, Dr. Wright summarized the administration's views and justifications. The U.S. and other NATO States are engaged in collective self-defense in its obligation to the SEATO pact. The fight is for self-determination and the U.S. has a "vital interest" in the preservation of the precedents set by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations.

Permanent Support
The government's final argument is that the defense of Vietnam is "ultimately necessary to the defense of the United States" if viewed in light of the domino theory, whereby one nation's fall makes the overthrow of any bordering nation more likely.

Aside from the legalistic aspects, critics oppose present policy for five major reasons. A united Viet Nam under a nationalist Ho Chi Minh would not be interested in further expansion. Second, even if the U.S. could win a total military victory, there would be no viable government without the continued support of U.S. troops and it would be necessary to "set up a permanent U.S. colony in Viet Nam."

Imperialist Tag
Third, the last thing that the United States wants is involvement with China in a land war, but further escalation will force a Chinese commitment to protect her rights. Fourth, continuation of the war will widen the gap between the United States and Russia. Finally, the war has fixed the tag of "imperialist" to the United States and its reputation has declined throughout the world.