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Nixon Sending British Expert on New Saigon Study

By TAD SZULC

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 15 — President Nixon is sending Sir Robert Thompson, the British expert on guerrilla warfare, back to South Vietnam next month for an urgent evaluation of the Saigon Government's police and public-safety programs, State Department officials said today.

Other Administration informants said that the British expert would also look into the joint American-South Vietnamese police and pacification activities, which range from efforts to wipe out the Communist political organization in the South to operation of South Vietnamese prisons with United States assistance.

State Department officials said that the proposal for Sir Robert to accept another mission in South Vietnam was made by the Saigon Government with the concurrence of the United States.

They said the request was forwarded by Ellsworth T. Bunker, the American Ambassador in Saigon, in a message to President Nixon earlier this month.

Sir Robert undertook a five-week secret mission for President Nixon last autumn — his

second visit to South Vietnam in a year—but it was not clear for what specific reasons he and his group of British police specialists had been asked to go back after so short an interval.

There was strict secrecy here surrounding Sir Robert's trip. But the speculation in informed quarters is that both Mr. Bunker and the Administration were eager to have an up-to-date independent evaluation of the progress of pacification and related public safety efforts. It is felt such an evaluation is needed before decisions are made on additional withdrawals of American troops from South Vietnam.

Another possible reason for the mission is that the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program, which is in over-all charge of pacification, is to be reorganized, effective March 1, as the Community Defense and Local Development Program.

Other informed sources said that both the Administration and Ambassador Bunker still appeared to be troubled by the relative lack of success in the destruction of the secret Communist network in South Vietnam. This has a bearing on the larger aspects of pacification and on the Vietnamization pro-

gram, under which South Vietnamese forces are gradually replacing American combat units.

The problem of the Communist organization in South Vietnam was reportedly a principal theme of the report Sir Robert presented to President Nixon at a secret conference last Oct. 13.

The New York Times last Dec. 2 reported that Sir Robert had gone to South Vietnam on a Presidential mission. The Times article said Administration officials had asserted that his report underlined the failure to eradicate the Communist network.

The next day, however, in confirming the existence of the Thompson report, the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said that "the overall thrust of the [New York Times] story, which leads to the impression that the pacification and Vietnamization programs are not doing well, is an incorrect impression."

Mr. Ziegler refused to describe the content of the report on security grounds. In an interview with the Associated Press last Dec. 13, Sir Robert declined to comment specifically on that part of the Times article that dealt with

the failure to destroy the Communist subversive organization. He said, however, that the Vietnamization and pacification policies were "unassailable by the enemy."

In mid-December, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird summoned to Washington the head of the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program, William E. Colby, to discuss the pacification problems. According to Administration informants, this review included questions about the Communist network raised in the Thompson report.

Officials here said today that Sir Robert's new mission would deal with United States and South Vietnamese "police and public safety" programs.

This appeared to suggest that Sir Robert and his advisers—who were not identified—would concentrate on pacification and, particularly, on the problems of the Communist underground.

The allied program to eradicate this organization is run jointly under the name of Operation Phoenix by the Civil Operations and Rural Development Program and the South Vietnamese National Police Directorate. Although the Civil Operations group is headed by a civilian, Ambassador Colby, most of its personnel engaged in Operation Phoenix is drawn from the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Officials indicated, however, that the Thompson mission would concern itself with other phases of the American and South Vietnamese police and public safety programs.

Both the National Police Directorate and the South Vietnamese prison system are advised and supported by the Public Safety Office of the Administration for International Developmental under over-all direction of Ambassador Colby's group.