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Expert Now Gloomy In Report to Nixon On Vietcong Power

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 2—Sir Robert Thompson, the British expert on guerrilla warfare, has told President Nixon that the United States and allied intelligence and police efforts have failed to destroy the Communist subversive apparatus in South Vietnam.

His report, submitted in writing to the President at an unpublicized White House meeting on Oct. 13, appears to be in marked contrast with the relatively optimistic views on the security situation in South Vietnam that Sir Robert offered Mr. Nixon last December.

Sir Robert's findings — outlined to The New York Times today by Administration officials familiar with the report — were based on a new five-week secret mission he undertook in South Vietnam at President Nixon's request during September and October before coming to Washington to deliver his report.

The previous mission for Mr.

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Nixon, which also lasted five weeks, was completed last Dec. 3, when he met with the President.

In his policy speech on Vietnam on Dec. 15, Mr. Nixon told of the Thompson mission, described his findings as "cautiously optimistic," and quoted him as reporting that, "I was very impressed by the improvement in the military and political situation in Vietnam as compared with all previous visits and especially in the security situation, both in Saigon and the rural areas."

Sir Robert's recent mission, however, as well as the existence of his October report



Associated Newspapers

Sir Robert Thompson

has been kept secret, reportedly because his new conclusions seem to question the validity of the pacification and Vietnamization programs, including Operation Phoenix, which has been described as a code name for a secret Central Intelligence Agency operation that led to the alleged massacre at My Lai March 16, 1968. *

On Oct. 14, the day after he conferred with President Nixon, Sir Robert discussed the Vietnam situation at a meeting of high level military officers and Defense Department and intelligence officials, paraphrasing in replies to questions the key points contained in his report to the President.

The main theme of Sir Robert's findings was that despite some successes in pacification, particularly in the performance by newly elected officials in South Vietnamese villages, there has been a general failure in police and intelligence efforts aimed at eliminating Vietcong apparatus in the country.

The Thompson report was said to have emphasized that success in other aspects of pacification cannot solve the basic political problem in Vietnam after the withdrawal of the bulk of American forces so long as the Vietcong apparatus remains virtually intact.

Despite continuing Administration optimism over pacification, as expressed in public statements, there are officials here with extensive experience in Vietnam who privately not only share Sir Robert's new conclusions but also argue that the South Vietnamese political and security situation is so fragile as to pose a critical threat to the Saigon Govern-

ment even in the presence of "residual" American combat forces.

Follows Earlier Assessment

Sir Robert's report followed an earlier assessment given to President Nixon by the Central Intelligence Agency that more than 30,000 Communist agents had been infiltrated into the Saigon Government, including the office of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

When The New York Times published on Oct. 19 an article based on the C.I.A. report, White House officials said that it exaggerated the extent of the infiltration and was "overly pessimistic." These comments were made, however, five days after the submission of the Thompson report declaring the allied antisubversive program to be "inadequate."

The responsibility for eradicating the underground Vietcong apparatus is vested in an agency known as Civil Operations Support, or CORDS, an arm of the United States military command in Saigon. CORDS works in cooperation with the South Vietnamese military intelligence and national police.

The American agency's main antisubversive instrument is the highly controversial Operation Phoenix, composed of South Vietnamese police and military and intelligence agents, United States civilian and military personnel and operatives of the Central Intelligence Agency, who play a key role in the whole operation.

Sir Robert was said to have reported, however, that the three-year-old Operation Phoenix and related activities were not doing "their job" and had failed to break up the enemy's main effort in South Vietnam.

Other intelligence sources said that Operation Phoenix itself was infiltrated by Vietcong agents.

Officials familiar with Sir Robert's conclusions said that he was much less optimistic over the worldwide aspects of the Vietnam situation than he was last year. Asked at the Pentagon meeting when the United States could leave Vietnamsified Communist shelling installations appeared to bear "not right away."