

PGI Digital Investigations

Andromeda – Vietnam

Emerging Harms – Task Force 47

28 June 2022

Executive Summary / Assessment

- PGI identified and mapped Task Force 47 infrastructure across Facebook, including a large private group where Brigading, Doxxing, and Coordinated Abusive Reporting are coordinated and carried out.
- Government statements and the structure around the group and its associated admins and pages suggests that the military oversee the highest level of TF47 – assigning overall objectives – but then each Military Zone has some freedom in determining how they achieve those objectives. This decentralised structure, as well as the overlap between official military and volunteer personnel, ensures that there is significant variation between Military Zone EH behaviours.
- This report focuses on a cluster linked to the Fourth Military Zone – it is a cluster of content creators, amplifiers, and large private groups dedicated to EH behaviours. The majority of these entities have custom FBIDs ending in 0447 – Fourth Zone, TF 47.
- Brigading, Doxxing, and Coordinated Abusive Reporting are coordinated and carried out via these private groups. Further comms infrastructure likely exists, but PGI did not identify any significant presence across Zalo or Telegram. PGI did not note any invite links to private chats across any of the groups and pages investigated. It is possible these comms are taking place via Facebook Messenger.
- Each cluster sits under one Facebook group with one set of admins. To map cluster to cluster PGI noted that there exist a series of central bridge accounts which post identical doxxing/propaganda content into multiple groups simultaneously. These generic central accounts are typically pseudonymous, often using imagery of Lotus flowers.

Report – Task Force 47

Network Structure

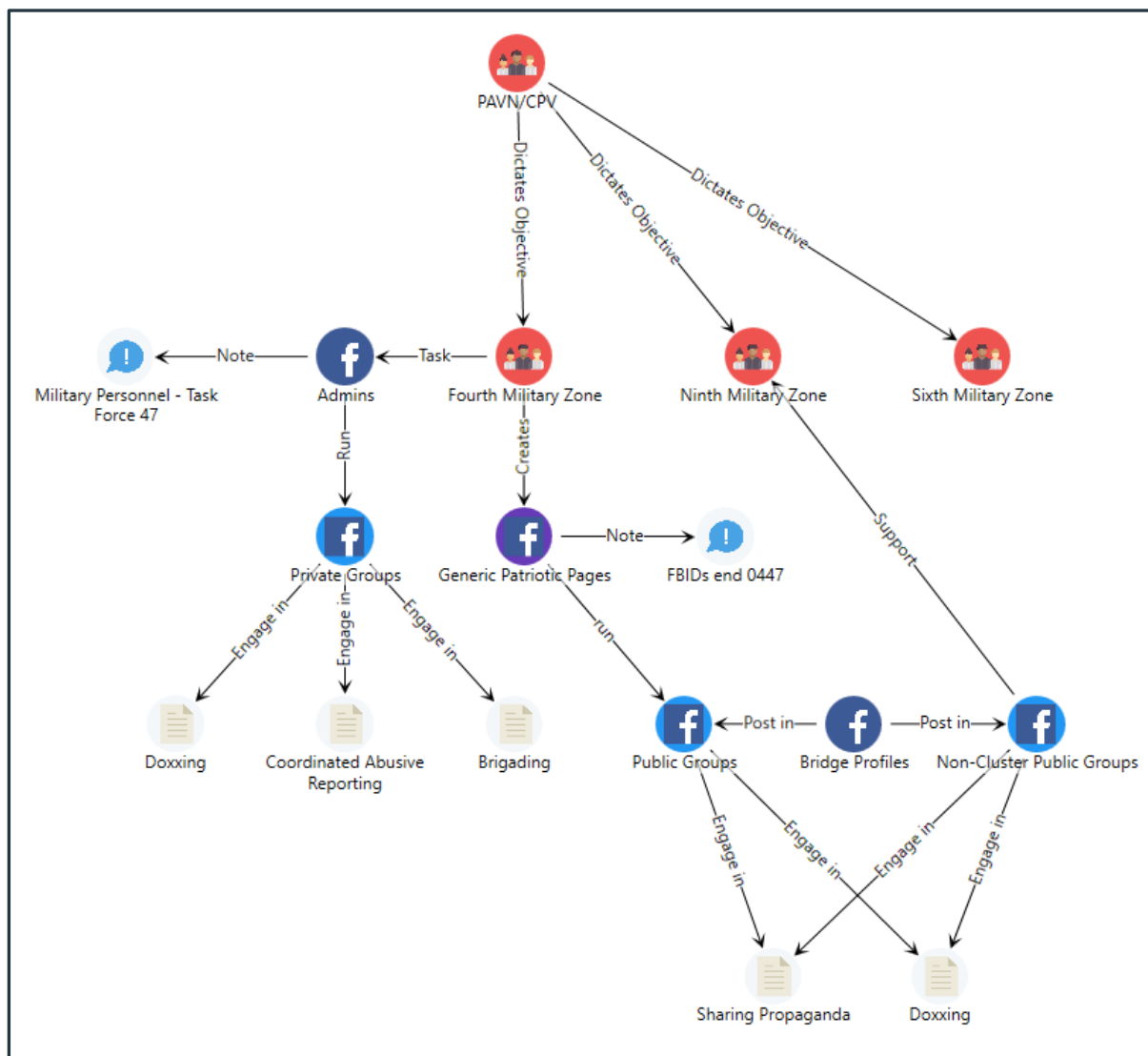


Figure 1: The general structure of the cluster explored in this report. It primarily relates to the Fourth Military Zone, but bridge profiles link it to the Ninth.

Context

- To answer Meta’s requests, PGI conducted a mix of digital investigation and HUMINT sourcing. There is significant information about Task Force 47 (TF47) in Vietnamese blogs and in speeches officials have made on the strategy of the unit.
- All indicators point to the task force being semi-informal in nature, similar to Thailand where staffers are asked to contribute to identifying ‘wrong thought’ such as lèse-majesté posts in their ‘spare’ time. HUMINT inquiries suggest that the core infrastructure is coordinated by official employees on military payroll – the admins of the top-level groups or comms channels – but that the majority of those involved in the day-to-day activities are volunteers.

- There is considerable detail about the activities of TF47 in Vietnamese military references. A statement from March 2022 is of particular interest, as it states that each military zone will be given a degree of individual freedom as to how they achieve the aims of TF47.¹ Another statement from the same source gives the name of a primary TF47 Facebook page.² That page runs a variety of private groups as the next level down of infrastructure.³
- This partial decentralisation is mirrored in further statements which note, for example, “District 6 Customs Department rewarded 17 individuals with outstanding achievements in implementing Directive 47 of the General Department of Politics”, again indicating TF47 operates at the district level under the auspices of multiple departments.⁴

Network Exploration

Media Coverage

- On 02 May 2022, Radio Free Asia published an article detailing the names of multiple Vietnamese Facebook groups which were focused on promoting the Kremlin’s perspective on the invasion of Ukraine.⁵ These groups likely constitute various wings of the public opinion brigades, state-sponsored web brigades run by the Communist Party of Vietnam. TF47 is a cyber-military element, and part of their remit overlaps with that of the public opinion brigades.
- The article names four groups: “Đơn vị Tác chiến Mạng” (Cyber Combat Unit), “Truy quét Phản động” (Elimination of Reactionary Forces), “Bộ Tư lệnh Tác chiến” (Combat Command), and “Trung đoàn 47” (Regiment 47). It also shows a screenshot of a fifth public group, named “đồng hành cùng lực lượng 47” (**Keeping Company with Force 47**), which it states is from 06 July 2021. The screenshot shows that the group is run by a page named NGÔI SAO RỪNG DỪA (literally: Coconut Forest Star). The article cited Vietnamese state media as saying that TF47 personnel operated the group. PGI pivoted from these names to identify further TF47 infrastructure on-platform.



Figure 2: The fifth group and managing page, identified from a screenshot in the article.

¹ <http://quansu.hungyen.gov.vn/portal/tienlu/pages/2022-3-16/Dang-uy-Quan-su-huyen-Tien-Lu-To-chuc-hoc-tap-quani75eaijq2mv8.aspx>

² <http://quansu.hungyen.gov.vn/portal/tienlu/pages/2021-12-30/Ban-CHQS-huyen-Tien-Lu-So-ket-hoat-dong-cua-Luc-lut2u466mx8fsw.aspx> ; <https://www.facebook.com/Chinhluan47/>

³ Including: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2154247044842275/>

⁴ <http://www.quan6.hochiminhcity.gov.vn/TinTuc/tintuc/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?List=43cc31f0%2D7871%2D4326%2D83d2%2D11fceebc16ea&ID=6196&Web=914d7bf3%2D7db3%2D45a9%2D8171%2D246d27cf1f24>

⁵ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/cyber-troops-05022022165037.html>

Keeping Company with Force 47

- Both the page and the public group from the screenshot have been deleted.⁶ PGI identified a recidivist/backup page using the same name, created in April 2022.⁷ The page lists an email, doansaovang020965@gmail.com. The email is linked to a Google Account in the name of SAO VÀNG ĐOÀN, meaning Golden Star Division – the 3rd Infantry Division of the People’s Army of Vietnam, based in Military Zone One.
- The first result in the Facebook native search for “đồng hành cùng lực lượng 47” shows a private group named “TRUY QUÉT PHẢN ĐỘNG!” (Reactive Sweeping/Scanning).⁸ The group was created in June 2017, the year after TF47 was established, and has amassed 16,400 members. PGI gained access to the group and explored its activities, admins, and connected infrastructure.

Activities – Objectives

- The group’s About section explicitly describes their two objectives. The first is to “Identify and counter reactionaries, negative sentiment, and anything against the government, party, and state, against the interests of the nation, anything sharing false information about Vietnamese history”. The second is to “Unmask [dox] reactionaries, to help the real people to understand who is really behind the posting of disinformation and fake content” (as translated).
- The group also encourages members to report suspected infiltrators to the admins. This instruction is provided both in the About section, and in posts in the group. The posts use the recently added ‘Anonymous Group Member’ function to share warnings. They also order all users to write with all diacritics, in a further attempt to identify infiltrators.

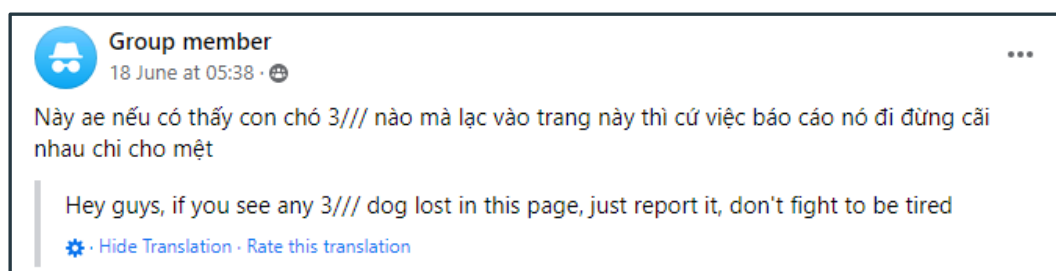


Figure 3: A post warning members to watch for infiltrators.⁹

- The use of 3/// or 3/ refers to 3 sọc (occasionally deliberately misspelled as 3 xọc), which means 3 stripes. It refers to the flag of South Vietnam as used until 1975. The flag remains popular among much of the Vietnamese diaspora. The use of 3/// is present

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/ngoisaozungdua/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/NG%C3%94I-SAO-R%E1%BB%AANG-D%E1%BB%AAA-113516528005485/>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5845455838848548/>

across multiple posts in the group, including some calling for the mass reporting or Brigading of Facebook groups,¹⁰ and of media entities like RFA, VOA, and the BBC.¹¹

Activities – Brigading and Doxxing

- Brigading is typically implicit, with users warning each other to ‘be wary’ or ‘pay attention to’ certain pages. Posts frequently describe targets as sensationalist/clickbait in order to justify their targeting.¹² Group members are encouraged to ‘pay a visit’ to user profiles.¹³ Justifications for user targeting vary – some are members of the diaspora who have allegedly been ‘unpatriotic’ and who are to be targeted while returning to Vietnam. Some are residents of Vietnam deemed to have spoken negatively about the state or military. Others are general international users accused of falsely portraying Vietnamese military/governmental history.
- Doxxing is more proactive, with members infiltrating groups of enemy ‘reactionaries’ to identify their social media profiles.¹⁴



Figure 4: A user noting they have infiltrated an ‘enemy’ group to spy on users.

- PGI noted multiple users targeting livestreams in real time for Brigading.¹⁵

Activities – Coordinated Abusive Reporting

- Coordinated Abusive Reporting targeting is a mix of proactive and reactive. Higher profile targets feature around significant anniversaries – such as Reunification Day on 30 April.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5806683452725787/>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5809383202455812/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5852809114779887/>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5821617044565761/>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5808694579191341/>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5833527053374760/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5816942635033202/>

Mods and admins typically delineate targets, with the highest profile targets pinned as featured posts in the group.

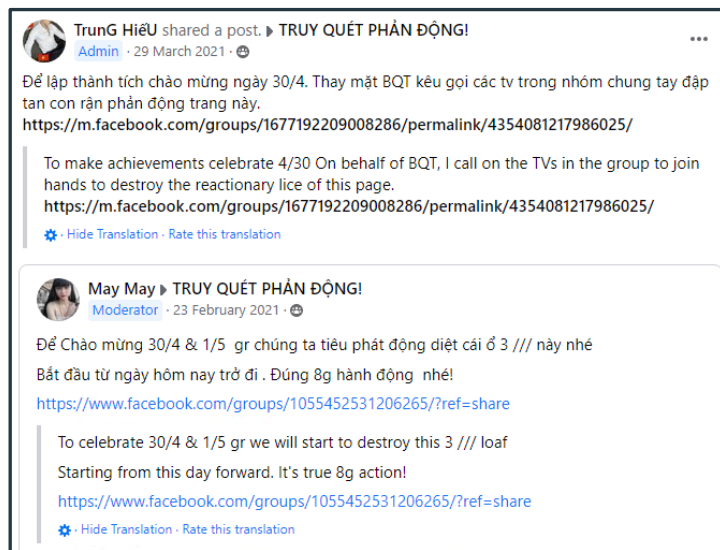


Figure 5: A mod and an admin delineating a target of interest in a featured post.¹⁶

- The group targeted in Figure 5 is of interest as it does not display a singular post or instance of perceived disinformation, but rather is a space dedicated to freedom of expression and open discussion. In the comments under the post, the May May moderator gives specific instructions on who and what to report. All of the reports are for political and social ‘disinformation’.

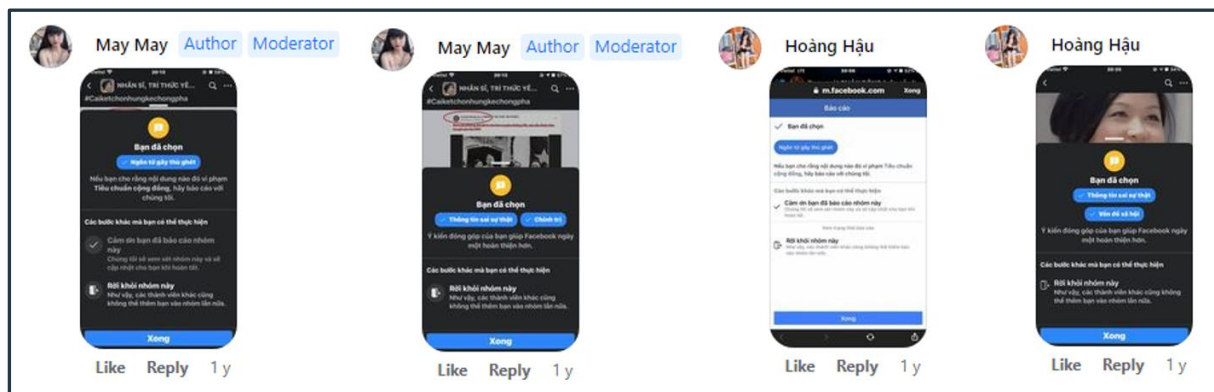


Figure 6: Reporting instructions from a moderator, and a user showing evidence of them acting on the call.

- Proactive targeting highlights the organic and decentralised nature of the operation, in which general users suggest potential targets or batches of targets.¹⁷ When posts are of enough interest, admins and mods will subsequently approve or disprove them for

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/4453898701337609/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5806502046077261/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5834371653290300/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5809098595817606/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/3332241920169965/> ;
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/4912702398790568/>

targeting. This varies from targeting seen in the Philippines, where Facebook group and Discord Server admins were the only ones who brought targets.

Huy động lực lượng vào report trang cá nhân để nó sớm mất nick
<https://www.facebook.com/viet.list>
Đánh bại siêu phản động

Figure 7: A user stating, "Mobilise the force to report this profile so it will lose its power, let us defeat the reactionaries."¹⁸

- The group celebrates when targets are de-platformed by Coordinated Abusive Reporting.¹⁹
- TF47 members are active across and target users on Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. There are multiple instances of YouTube Channels being selected for reporting throughout the group history.²⁰

Admins – Identification

- The TRUY QUÉT PHẢN ĐỘNG! group has two admins, Trung Thành and TrunG HiêU. The Thanh profile states it is from Argentina, and uses a Spotify link to claim it has 368,000 followers.²¹ It joined Facebook on 25 March 2020, and was immediately made an admin of the group. Thanh has zero activity in the group.²² The Hieu profile states it is from Australia, and uses the same Spotify link to claim 1,368,100 followers.²³ It has been an admin of the group since 04 August 2018.
- The first profile photo uploaded by the Thanh profile contains a caption stating, "The Silent Protector – Trung Hieu", indicating the two profiles are the same individual.
- Hieu has posted sporadically in the group, including a recent post claiming they were being impersonated, again calling for members to be aware of potential infiltration.²⁴
- The admins and mods have largely private profiles, with little personally identifiable information. Rebuilding their friend networks (to the degree possible) shows a mix of nodes with substantial interconnectivity and some isolated moderators.

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5809098595817606/>

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/4854957847898357/>

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5838083839585748/> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5172916102769195/>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100049081183624>

²² This matches a pattern displayed by various ghost profiles across TF47 infrastructure – they're ever present, and admin groups, but very rarely post themselves. Example:

<https://www.facebook.com/muongbien.hoa.3998> in <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2154247044842275/>

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100027930062630>

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1677192209008286/posts/5822910997769699/>

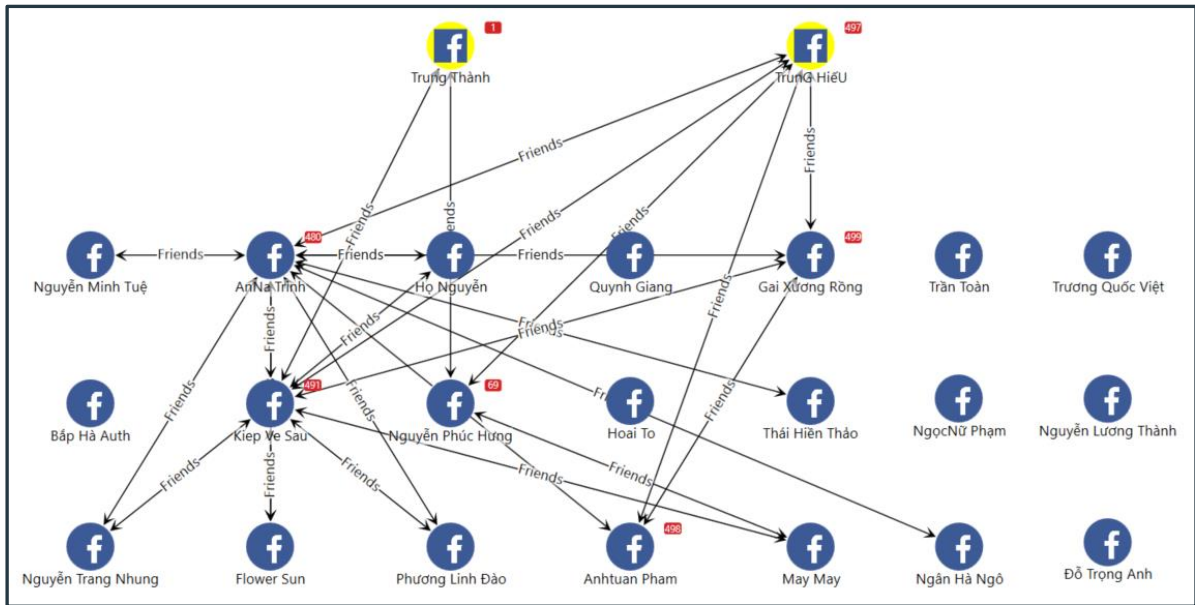


Figure 8: (partial) friend connections within the admins and moderators.

- The most interconnected profile, Anna Trinh, is likely another alias for the admins.²⁵ Created on 22 February 2020, it became a moderator of the group on 23 February 2020. Content shared on the Anna profile itself is generally highly offensive, and again targets perceived enemies.²⁶

Admins – Likes

- The admins have two liked pages in common.

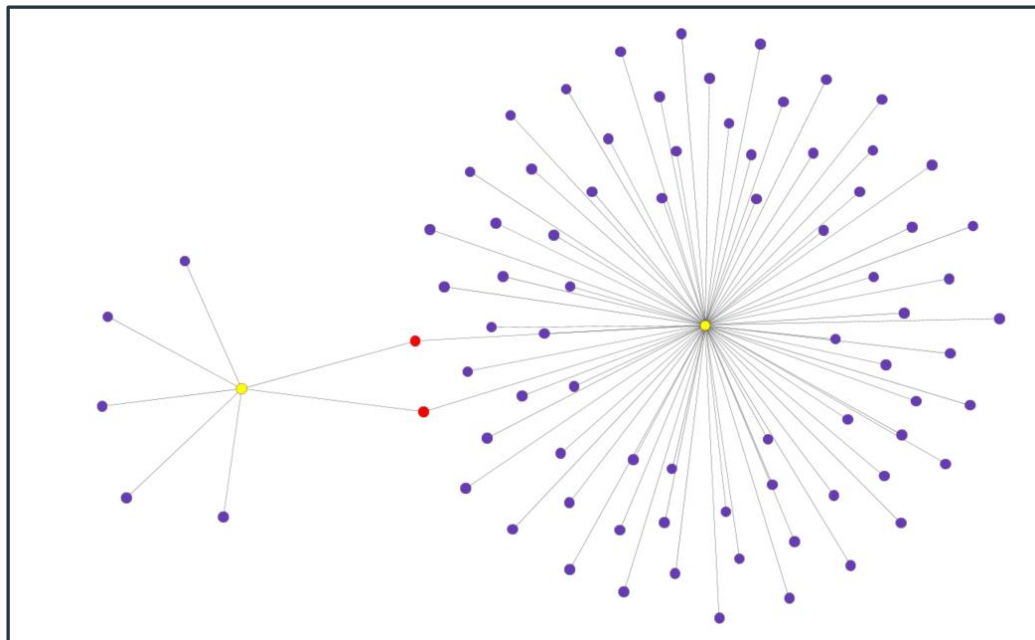


Figure 9: Liked Pages in common (red) between the two admins (yellow).

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/anna.trinh.5623293>

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=123039115955393&set=ecnf.100047479160431>

- The two are Quyết Chiến - Quyết Thắng (Decisive Battle – Decisive Victory) and Tổ Quốc Nơi Đầu Sóng (Homeland Where the Waves Are).²⁷ Quyet’s About information notes a similar objective to TF47, stating that it aims to “fight against the distorting rhetoric of hostile forces”. It also lists an email address, liuoang@gmail.com.
- The Quyet custom FBID @Quyetchienquyetthang0447 ends in 47.
- The page runs a public group with the same name, which lists near-identical objectives as TRUY QUÉT PHẦN ĐÔNG!.²⁸ There is some overlap between content shared into the two groups. Pages overtly disclosing their objective of attacking criticism of the military regularly post into the group.²⁹ Quyet runs two other groups with identical objectives, also with custom FBIDs ending in 47 - @vinhandanquenminh47³⁰ and @xuavanay47.³¹
- All the groups list their owner as a page named Xưa và Nay (Past and Present), which also has a custom FBID ending in 47 - @xuavanay0447.³² That page lists the same email as the Quyet page, liuoang@gmail.com. Xưa và Nay also lists a phone number, +84 91 787 62 26, searches for which return a now-deleted Facebook page, again with a FBID ending in 47 - @vinhandanquenminh0447.³³ The page was deleted during this investigation between 21 and 24 June 2022. It followed 355 profiles and pages, the majority of which were organic individuals engaging in Coordinated Abusive Reporting.³⁴
- Pivoting through Google, PGI identified one further page listing the same email.³⁵ It does not have the same 47FBID ending. The email address is linked to a Google Account in the name of “Long Vo Van” and uses a profile picture showing members of an unidentified organisation.



Figure 10: Long Vo Van - liuoang@gmail.com's Google Account picture.

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Quyetchienquyetthang0447/> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/GOISONGBIENDONG/>

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/quyetchienquyetthang47/>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Haucanquankhu4/>

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vinhandanquenminh47/>

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/xuavanay47/>

³² <https://www.facebook.com/xuavanay0447>

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/vinhandanquenminh0447/>

³⁴ For example: <https://www.facebook.com/HoSoDietPhan.AntiReactionaryProfile/>

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/B%E1%BA%A1n-M%E1%BA%BFn-D%C3%A2n-Tin-101234181300084>

Military URL Promotion

- Many of the pages and groups in this cluster have promoted the web portal for the Fourth Military Zone.³⁶ Running CrowdTangle against that URL shows further groups and pages with identical objectives as groups in the cluster, but no apparent infrastructure overlap.³⁷
- However, many of the pages in this new cluster have a custom FBID ending in 0447 – corresponding to Military Zone Four – Task Force 47.
- This demonstrates that different military zones are fulfilling TF47 objectives in different ways, supporting the idea of a heavily decentralised network and a lack of strict C2 infrastructure at the national level.

Member Mapping

- The above cluster sits around one private Facebook group. Pivoting from accounts and pages which post regular doxxing content into this group, PGI noted the same accounts present across multiple other TF47 groups. They function as bridges for mapping the wider ecosystem of interconnected clusters. These central accounts/pages are typically pseudonymous and generic, often using imagery of Lotus flowers.

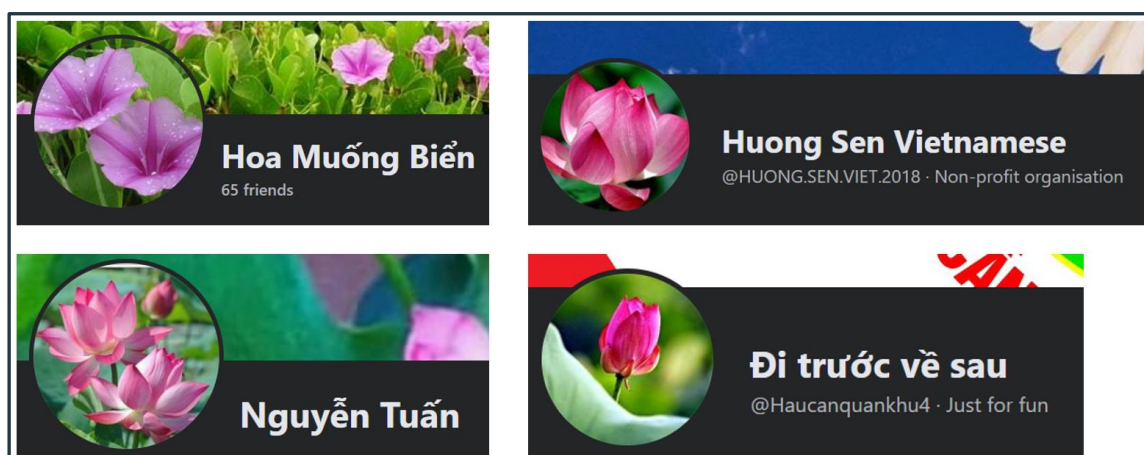


Figure 11: Lotus Bridge profiles.

- Đi trước về sau, Hương Sen Việt, Nguyễn Tuấn, and Hoa Muống Biển are four examples of bridge pages and profiles.³⁸ Di Truoc Ve Sau is a bridge between official military nodes and large private groups, regularly posting into TRUY QUÉT PHẢN ĐỘNG!. Hương Sen Viet is a bridge between several of the groups admined by VỮNG TIN THEO ĐẢNG,³⁹ as well as a bridge to multiple further groups with the same objective of ‘countering

³⁶ <http://baoguankhu4.com.vn/>

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/491239251684468/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/HaokhiVietNam2020/>

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/Haucanquankhu4/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/HUONG.SEN.VIET.2018/> and <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100027384647182>

³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Chinhluan47/groups>

criticism’ as TF47.⁴⁰ Nguyen Tan is a bridge between overt TF47 groups and generic nationalist groups.⁴¹ Hoa Muong Bien has multiple roles – they admin some groups run by pages in the cluster, but are otherwise a ghost profile, only engaging with something high priority.⁴²

- De Truoc Ve Sau is also a bridge to the Ninth Military Zone. The profile regularly engages in the CÂY TRÀM ĐỎ (Red Melaleuca) group.⁴³ Cay Tram Do’s bio states that its objective is to “Fight against political views, reactions, and opportunities in cyberspace.” The group primarily exists to amplify content relating to #LQK9 – LÍNH QUÂN KHU 9 – the Ninth Military Zone.⁴⁴ #QK4 – the Fourth Military Zone – is much less prominent in the group’s topics.⁴⁵
- There is likely some significance to the colours chosen in group names. Cay Tram Do – Red Melaleuca – and Nhom Song Xanh – Blue Waves – suggest a potential red team / blue team split to group objectives.⁴⁶

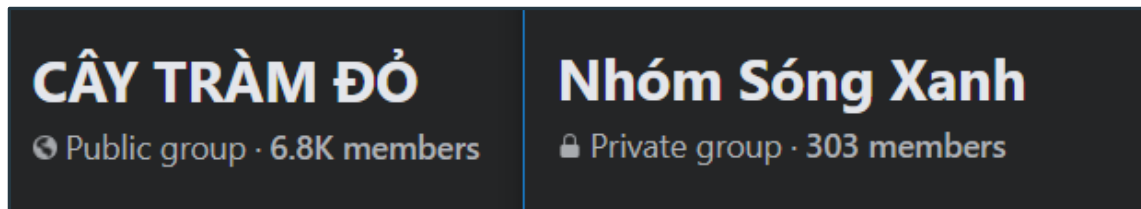


Figure 12: The public Red Team and private Blue Team groups.

Comms and Opsec

- PGI noted limited efforts to shift audiences to Zalo for comms. Most suggestions were met with responses noting they already had Facebook groups and chats for comms. One user asking about Zalo was instead told to apply to a second, more restricted Facebook group.⁴⁷ **It is highly likely that further coordination takes place in this group.**
- PGI further investigated Zalo to assess the extent of open TF47 coordination via the platform, but did not identify any groups of interest. Running search terms for EH behaviours and invites to other private groups in military-themed and patriotic groups returned no results.
- To access the TRUY QUÉT PHẢN ĐỘNG! private group, admins posed two questions. The first asked the user to explain why Viet Tan is an organisation that ‘reforms the country’,

⁴⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1895389154102978/> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1829741633921085/> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2363398967047274/>

⁴¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/542538489574497/>

⁴² <https://www.facebook.com/muongbien.hoa.3998>

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1829741633921085>

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/QuanKhu9>

⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1829741633921085/hashtags>

⁴⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2154247044842275/> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1829741633921085/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/226225306036011/>

warning that should they provide no explanation the application would be rejected. The second question asks whether the user loves peace or war.



Answer questions

TRUY QUÉT PHẢN ĐỘNG!
Private group · 16.4K members

Việt Tân có phải là tổ chức "canh tân đất nước" không. Cho ...
lời giải thích còn không thì không xét duyệt!

Việt Tân là tổ chức phản động nước ngoài, không phải canh tân đất nước

Bạn yêu hòa bình hay yêu chiến tranh? "Nhiệt huyết cần đi ...
đổi với sự tinh táo, có trái tim nóng chưa đủ mà cần phải
có cái đầu lạnh". KHÔNG TRẢ LỜI ĐỦ NHÓM MIỄN TIẾP

Tôi yêu hoà bình và đồng ý nhiệt huyết cần đi chung với sự tinh táo

Do not enter your password or other sensitive information here, even if you're asked to by the TRUY QUÉT PHẢN ĐỘNG! admins.

Cancel Submit

Figure 13: Entry gated questions, and the successful responses.

Conclusions

- Task Force 47 are active across Facebook. The military oversee a decentralised network of content creators, amplifiers, and large private groups dedicated to EH behaviours.
- Brigading, Doxing, and Coordinated Abusive Reporting are coordinated and carried out via these private groups. Public groups primarily focus on sharing pro-state propaganda.
- The Facebook infrastructure is not under a strict military hierarchy, but shows signs of coordination – in particular around naming conventions with Fourth Military Zone TF47 infrastructure typically using a custom FBID ending in 0447.
- Further comms infrastructure likely exists. PGI did not identify any significant presence across Zalo or Telegram. It is possible these comms are taking place via Facebook Messenger.

Further Assorted TF47 Infrastructure

- PGI identified other tangential TF47 infrastructure during this investigation, including:
- A public group with 38,000 members called the Golden Star Newsletter, dedicated to 'sharing propaganda against reactionaries'.⁴⁸
- An interest page using TF47 branding.⁴⁹ It is also an owner of the @vinhandanquenminh47 group,⁵⁰ like @Quyetchienquyetthang0447 above. The group is named 'Zone Four', suggesting it is part of the same operation focused on the Fourth Military Zone.
- A general page again using TF47 branding.⁵¹
- Three pages using the same branding created within three days of each other in December 2017.⁵²
- A video creator using the 47 signaller.⁵³
- A page claiming to be TF47-affiliated which seems more focused on driving clickbait traffic to its domain.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Bantinsaovang>

⁴⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/L%E1%BB%B0C-L%C6%AF%E1%BB%A2NG-47-LT-875162549328645/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vinhandanquenminh47>

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/trungdoan47dotcom/>

⁵² <https://www.facebook.com/lucluong47VietNam> ; <https://www.facebook.com/lucluong47.dequocdonglao> ; <https://www.facebook.com/lLucluongtacchienkhonggianmang/>

⁵³ <https://www.facebook.com/toiyeuvietnamquetui/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/cldxuyentac>