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Background Briefing:

Vietnam: How Large is the Security Establishment?

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In 2013 you were quoted as follows: "Professor Carl Thayer of the Australian Defence Forces Academy estimates that at least 6.7 million Vietnamese belong to the country's many security agencies, roughly one-sixth of its 43-million working population [Palash Ghosh, "Vietnam: A Police State Where One-In-Six Works For Security Forces," *International Business Times*, August 29, 2013; <http://www.ibtimes.com/vietnam-police-state-where-one-six-works-security-forces-1401629>."

Is this estimate still accurate and did you come to that number?

ANSWER: The figure of 6.7 million in this quote appears to be taken from my handbook entry published in 2008 and a conference paper presented in 2010 (later published in 2014):

Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam," in Stuart Farson, Peter Gill, Mark Phythian, and Shlomo Shapiro eds., *PSI Handbook of Global Security and Intelligence: National Approaches*, Vol. 1, *The Americas and Asia* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger Security International, 2008). 300-317.

_____, "The Apparatus of Authoritarian Rule in Viet Nam," Paper for Conference on Authoritarianism in East Asia, Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, June 29-July 1, 2010.

_____, "The Apparatus of Authoritarian Rule in Viet Nam," in Jonathan London, ed., *Politics in Contemporary Vietnam: Party, State, and Authority Relations*. Critical Studies of the Asia-Pacific Series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 135-161

The figure of 6.7 million includes 1.2 million Ministry of Public Security (MPS) employees plus five million urban people's self-defence force personnel and rural people's militia. The figure of 1.2 million was taken from Federal Agent Laurie Gray, 'Postcard from Vietnam,' *Australian Federal Police Magazine*, December 2000, www.afp.gov/about/publications, accessed July 24, 2006:

Police comprise 1.2 officers nationwide, distributed across a range of departments: community policing, criminal investigations, drug investigations, economic crime, prison administration, traffic, civil disturbance, VIP protection,

firefighting, administration, logistics, personnel, vehicle registration, house registration, national identity card system. Police is a uniformed organization – emphasis on visibility and ancillary deterrent effect.

I wrote in 2014:

The People's Armed Security Force (Công An Vũ Trang Nhân Dân), established in 1959, operates primarily in rural areas at district and, in some cases, village level. It is charged with responsibility for dealing with ordinary crime, illegal political activity, and insurgency. According to one authoritative account, in the 1980s the PASF largely bypassed or coordinated only laterally with the Ministry of Interior (now Public Security), its nominal superior, and reported directly to the party Secretariat (Library of Congress 1987). In this sense, the PASF may be viewed as an extension of party control at the local level where it comes under the direction of the People's Committee. In recent years the MPS has assumed greater vertical control over the PSAF [Carlyle A. Thayer, "The Apparatus of Authoritarian Rule in Viet Nam," in Jonathan London, ed., *Politics in Contemporary Vietnam: Party, State, and Authority Relations*. Critical Studies of the Asia-Pacific Series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 135-161].

I have not seen any recent figures for the size of the Ministry of Public Security.

The figure of five million includes Vietnam's urban people's self-defence force and rural people's militia and were taken from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* for the appropriate years and have remained static.

As a rough estimate, the working population of Vietnam today is around 56% or 53 million of the total population of 95 million. If we add the 1.2 MPS employees to the urban and military forces (5 million) this would come to 6.2 million or 11.7% of the working population (a decline from one-sixth or 16% in 2013).

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