



On-going Activity at North Korea's Punggye-ri Test Site

David Albright, Serena Kelleher-Vergantini, and Priscilla Kim

May 9, 2014

New Digital Globe high resolution commercial satellite imagery dated Friday, May 9, 2014 shows on-going activities at North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site and a new relatively large roof structure near a potential test tunnel (see figure 1). While movement of possible vehicles, trucks, and containers is visible at the South Portal, a new large object – possibly a cover – is clearly visible at the West Portal. ISIS has been monitoring and updating its analysis of the site (see previous [ISIS Imagery Briefs](#)) using satellite imagery dated April 23, 25, 29, and May 1, 2014 which is included as figures 2, 3, 4, and 5.

West Portal

The most significant new development is at the West Portal, where a very large, lighter-colored object – possibly a cover – appears close to the tunnel entrances. This object, which looks more like a large solid roof structure, was not present in previous imagery. Its purpose could not be determined from the image.

Cars and containers are also visible at the West Portal area. Additionally, spoils are being spread out compared to earlier imagery (see figures 1 and 4) and excavation is taking place above one of the tunnel entrances.

South Portal

On May 9, two black cars appear in the same location as they did on May 1 near the South Portal tunnel entrances (figures 1 and 2). On April 29, 2014, these cars and other vehicles were visible on the small road leading toward the South Portal tunnel entrance (see figure 3). A lighter-colored vehicle, possibly a relatively large white truck, visible in earlier images is no longer visible near the portals. The truck could be at the main support area but not distinguishable in the image, or it could have left the site.

The possible tarp or other cover at the South Portal remains. Finally, the imagery shows the oddly shaped object with three radiating arms that had been previously identified in the South Portal area. This object remains unidentified, although some analysts have suggested to ISIS that it could be an antenna of some kind. However, its particular placement is not consistent with an antenna.

Conclusions

The activities ISIS detected at North Korea's test site on May 9, 2014 cannot confirm media claims that a test is imminent.¹ All these activities are consistent with the view that a test or tests will occur soon. However, the exact timing of a test or tests is difficult to construe from the on-going activity. Moreover, recent North Korean official statements have added to the uncertainty about when a test could occur. With more time, the United States and China have additional opportunities to press North Korea not to test.

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/10812566/United-States-warns-of-imminent-North-Korea-nuclear-test.html>
http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2014/05/07/2014050700806.html
<http://nwww.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140507001357>

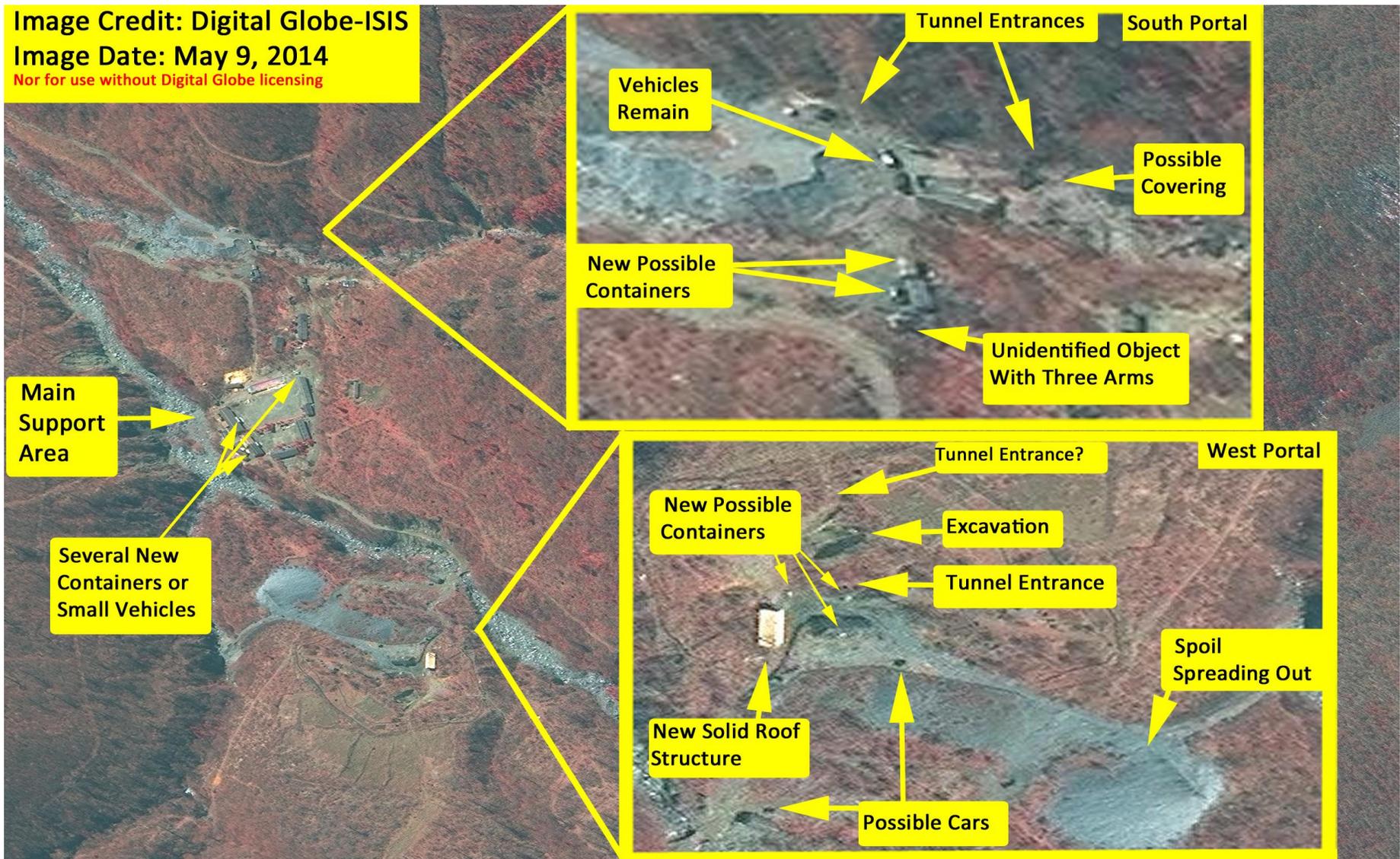


Figure 1. Digital Globe imagery showing North Korea’s Punggye-ri nuclear test site May 9, 2014. Colors in this image are slightly different compared to previous imagery because this image comprises a near-infrared band (NIR) that creates false colors to enable the human eye to detect and distinguish between vegetation and water. For example vegetation appears red and water appears dark blue or black.

Image Credit: Airbus - ISIS
Image Date: May 1, 2014

Not for use without Airbus licensing



Figure 2. Airbus imagery showing North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site May 1, 2014.

Image Credit: Digital Globe-ISIS

Image Date: April 29, 2014

Not for use without Digital Globe Licensing

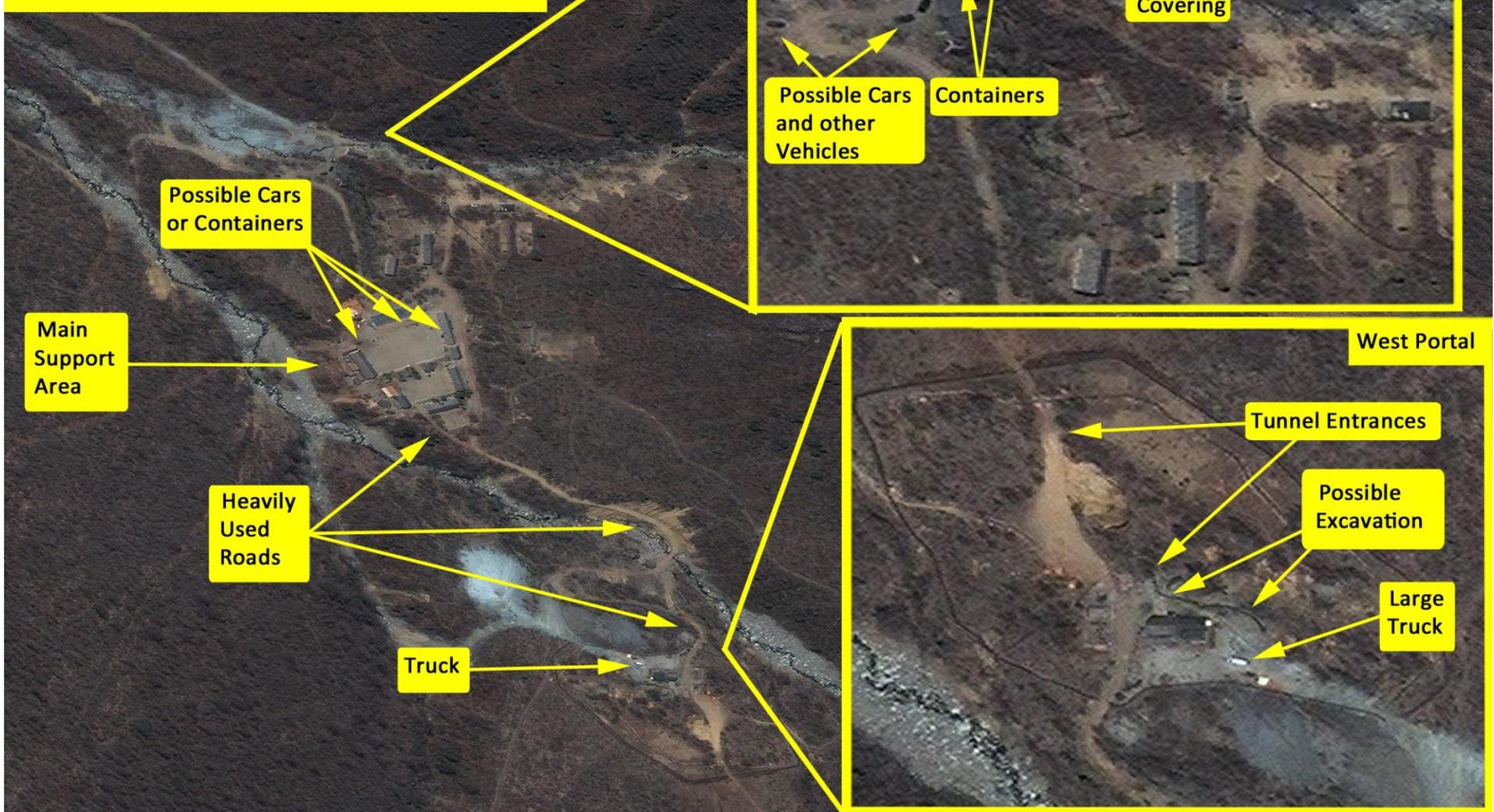


Figure 3. Digital Globe imagery showing North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site on April 29, 2014

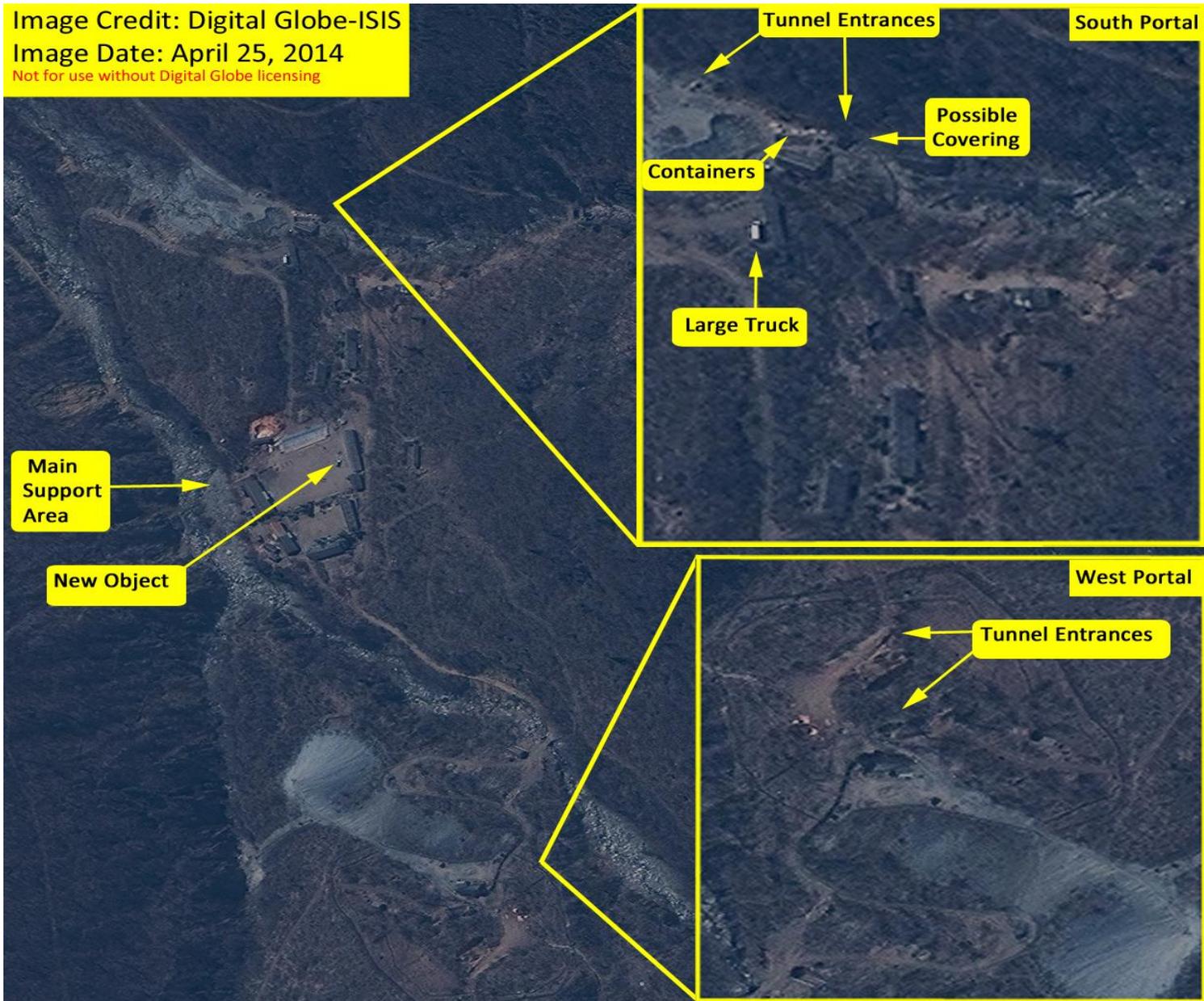


Figure 4. Digital Globe imagery showing North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site on April 25, 2014.

Image Credit: Digital Globe-ISIS
Image Date: April 23, 2014
Not for use without Digital Globe licensing



Figure 5. Digital Globe imagery showing North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site on April 23, 2014.