

# North Korea Imagery Analysis of Camp 15 “Yodŏk” Closure of the “Revolutionizing Zone”

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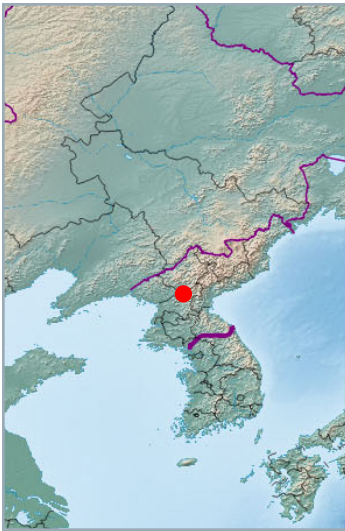
THE COMMITTEE FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA  
북한인권위원회



ALLSOURCE ANALYSIS



## North Korea: Camp 15 “Yodŏk”—Closure of the “Revolutionizing Zone”

**Location:**

Yodŏkgun, Hamgyŏng-namdo

**Coordinates:**

39.671450, 126.852357

**Date of Report:**

September 18, 2015

**Date of Imagery:**

August 2003–October 2014

**Size of Facility:**

6.6 km<sup>2</sup> (2.5 mi<sup>2</sup>)

**Overview of North Korea's Political Prison Camp System**

Despite the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK, more commonly known as North Korea) adamant denial that political prison camps exist—most recently again in a letter dated February 5, 2015, addressed by the North Korean permanent representative to the UN Office in Geneva to the UN Human Rights Council<sup>1</sup> and at the nineteenth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva<sup>2</sup>—research based on interviews and satellite imagery reveals a shocking and detailed operation of a

1 “Letter dated 5 February 2015,” A/HRC/28/G/5, 18 February 2015, available at <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/6450257.30133057.html>.

2 DPRK, “National Report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21,” A/HRC/WG.6/19/PRK/1, 30 January 2014, available at <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/9056040.64464569.html>; for the UPR report, see UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Democratic People's Republic of Korea,” A/HRC/27/10, 2 July 2014, available at [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a\\_hrc\\_27\\_10.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_hrc_27_10.pdf).

vast system of arbitrary and extra-judicial, unlawful detention. In its findings released in February 2014, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK (UN COI) determined that “crimes against humanity have been committed in North Korea, pursuant to policies established at the highest level of the State.” Many of these crimes against humanity take place against persons detained in political and other prison camps—persons who the Commission determined are among the “primary targets of a systematic and widespread attack” by the North Korean regime—including: murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political grounds, and the enforced disappearance of persons.

Through this vast system of unlawful imprisonment, the North Korean regime isolates, banishes, punishes, and executes those suspected of being disloyal to the regime. They are deemed “wrong-thinkers,” “wrong-doers,” or those who have acquired “wrong-knowledge” or have engaged in “wrong-associations.” Up to 120,000 are known to be held in the *kwan-li-so* political

prison camps where they are relentlessly subjected to malnutrition, forced labor, and other cruel and unusual punishment. Thousands upon thousands more are forcibly held in other detention facilities. North Korea denies access to the camps to outsiders, whether human rights investigators, scholars, or international media, and severely restricts the circulation of information across its borders.

Based on research conducted by the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK), three trends have defined the human rights situation under the Kim Jong-un regime: 1) an intensive crackdown on attempted defections; 2) an aggressive purge of senior officials, aimed to consolidate the leader's grip on power; and 3) a “restructuring” of the political prison camp system, with some facilities closer to the border with China being shut down, while inland facilities have been expanded.

Camp 22 in Hoeryong, North Hamgyŏng Province has ceased to function as a political prison camp. In the process of transferring the prisoners to other detention facilities, several thousand went unaccounted for. Following reports from





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sources inside North Korea that Camp 15 may have been shut down as well, HRNK and AllSource Analysis (ASA) have endeavored to closely follow developments at that facility for three main reasons: 1) to confirm whether Camp 15 was indeed shut down or whether it is still operational; 2) to understand the patterns surrounding the camp “restructuring;” and 3) to send a clear signal to the North Korean authorities that international NGOs are watching and any attempts to eliminate witnesses will not go unnoticed or unpunished. The ultimate goal of the HRNK-ASA collaboration is to protect the most vulnerable group in North Korea, political prisoners, through enhancing international awareness of their plight and whereabouts through scientifically measurable data and witness testimony.

### Introduction

As part of a joint undertaking with HRNK to use satellite imagery to shed light on human suffering in North Korea, ASA has been monitoring activity at political prison facilities throughout North Korea. This report details activity at a sub-component of Camp 15 (*Kwan-li-so* 15, Political Prison

Facility 15, or Yodŏk Political Prison Camp) commonly known as the “Revolutionizing Zone.”<sup>3</sup>

### About Camp 15 “Yodŏk”

Yodŏk is the most well known of North Korea’s prison camps, primarily because it has sections known as “revolutionizing processing zones” (*hyeok-myong-hwa-koo-yeok*). Prisoners judged to have been “re-revolutionized” or “re-educated through labor” from being “counter-revolutionaries” to being again potential loyal participants in the “Kim Il-sung nation” are thus eligible for release. Once released from Camp 15, a number of former prisoners concluded that they would always be under suspicion and surveillance and had no possibility of a good future if they remained in North Korea, so they fled to China with the intention of going on to South Korea.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A few former prisoners refer to the southern area of Camp 15 (including the Revolutionizing Zone) as “*Sorimchon*.” It is a slang combination of both *Sŏrim-dong* (the name of the town at the entrance to the camp and the site of its headquarters) and *Ipsŏn-ch’ŏn*, the stream (*ch’ŏn* means stream) that runs through it.

<sup>4</sup> See David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag Second Edition: The Lives and Voices of “Those Who Are Sent to the Mountains”* (Washington, D.C.: Committee

The following former prisoners of Camp 15 have testimony that appears in *Hidden Gulag Second Edition*:

- ▶ Mrs. Kim Young-soon, imprisoned 1970-1978 (p. 56)
- ▶ Mr. Kang Chol-hwan, imprisoned 1977-1987 (p. 59)
- ▶ Mr. An Hyuk, imprisoned 1987-1989 (p. 60)
- ▶ Mr. Kim Tae-jin, imprisoned 1988-1992 (p. 60)
- ▶ Mr. Lee Young-kuk, imprisoned 1995-1999 (p. 61)
- ▶ Former Prisoner #27, imprisoned 1999-2000 (p. 62)
- ▶ Mr. Kim Eun-chol, imprisoned 2000-2003 (p. 64)
- ▶ Mr. Jung Gwang-il, imprisoned 2000-2003 (p. 65)
- ▶ Former Prisoner #28, imprisoned 1999-2006 (p. 67).

### Executive Summary

Former prisoners who were housed within the “Revolutionizing Zone” report

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for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012), available at [http://hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK\\_HiddenGulag2\\_Web\\_5-18.pdf](http://hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_HiddenGulag2_Web_5-18.pdf).

that they were treated essentially the same as those detainees in the larger camp (known commonly as the “Total Control Zone”) but had a better chance of being released. These same former prisoners report the “Revolutionizing Zone” was abandoned and the detainee housing and related support buildings were razed sometime between 2006–2014. To confirm or negate these reports, ASA examined the “Revolutionizing Zone” using pan-sharpened multispectral satellite imagery collected by DigitalGlobe and Airbus Defense and Space from August 2003 through December 2014. *This imagery analysis confirms the detainee facility and a small number of support buildings were razed between 2013–2014 and that the former “Revolutionizing Zone” is no longer used to house detainees.* This imagery analysis alone, however, cannot determine the fate of the detainees formerly housed at this facility.

Although North Korean officials, especially within the Korean People’s Army and internal security organizations, understand the importance of camouflage, concealment, and deception (CCD) procedures to mask their operations and intentions,



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they do not appear to have attempted to hide the fact that the detainee housing and related support buildings were razed.

ASA and HRNK are aware of North Korean capabilities in CCD. Previously, when HRNK and DigitalGlobe examined developments at Camp 22 in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, satellite imagery analysis initially indicated that activity inside and around the camp was continuing. Through testimony of former prisoners and guards, and based on information provided by sources inside North Korea, HRNK was able to establish that it was no longer prisoners but “regular” farmers and miners from adjacent villages who had taken up the tasks previously performed by prisoners.

Mindful of that precedent, ASA and HRNK are approaching developments at Camp 15 cautiously and gradually. The razing of buildings, or even of an entire section of the camp, does not necessarily mean that the camp has ceased to function as a detention facility. Each report published by ASA and HRNK under the current collaborative project is a stepping stone toward a final

determination. Only after thorough analysis of newly acquired and archived satellite imagery, and only after cross-checking that imagery with the testimony of witnesses and in-country sources, will ASA and HRNK be certain of the current status of Political Prison Camp 15 Yodŏk.

Whether Camp 15 continues to be operational or not, North Korea’s vast system of unlawful imprisonment has not been dismantled. Up to 120,000 political prisoners detained in North Korea’s “hidden gulag” continue to be subjected to induced malnutrition, forced labor, torture, and extra-judicial killings. The razing of structures or “downsizing” of a camp does not imply that the entire political prison camp system is being dismantled. One of the preliminary findings of this ongoing research is that we are faced with a “restructuring” rather than dismantlement of North Korea’s political prison camp system. Incensed by international reporting on its crimes against humanity and other egregious human rights abuses, in particular by the UN COI report and subsequent UN

action, the North Korean regime appears to be stepping up its efforts to conceal the “heart of darkness” of its oppressive system, its political prison camps, from international scrutiny made possible by satellite imagery analysis.

### Imagery Analysis

Located in the southwest corner of Camp 15 is an irregularly-shaped secure agricultural-related area encompassing 6.6 km<sup>2</sup> that is commonly referred to by detainees as the “Revolutionizing Zone.” It is separated from the majority of the camp by a guarded entrance and an internal security fence (Figure 1). Although there are several outlying buildings, the primary infrastructure is located on the east side and can be functionally divided into four distinct areas: entrance and guard position; support area; guard barracks; and detainee facility (Figure 2). The detainee facility is surrounded by a wall and is accessible via a guarded entrance on the south side. Internally, the detainee area is sub-divided into five functional areas: administration; Worker Unit #1 housing; Worker Unit #2 housing; new prisoner housing, which is

separated from the rest of the facility by an internal wall; and support (e.g., medical clinic, tool shed, mess hall, etc.) (Figure 3).

Between August 2003 and April 2013, there were no significant changes to guard facilities, detainee housing, or related support buildings (Figure 4). Between April and September 2013, however, the clinic and housing and mess hall for Worker Unit #2 were razed (Figure 5). The rest of the facility remained essentially unchanged. By October 2014, the remainder of the detainee housing facility and 14 of the 20 support buildings were razed (Figure 6 and Figure 7). Although the entrance and guard position and the guard barracks remain, it is unclear if they are operational. No recent significant activity was observed within the former “Revolutionizing Zone” as of February 2015.

### Key Terms

The following is a brief description of each type of detention facility in North Korea:

*Kwan-li-so* – political prison camps, where scores of thousands of





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political prisoners—along with up to three generations of members of their families—are banished, deported, and imprisoned without any judicial process, and subjected to slave labor in mining, logging, or various agricultural enterprises, generally for their entire lives. Prisoners operate within sprawling encampments that are enclosed in barbed wires and electrified fences, mostly in the north and north-central mountains of North Korea.

The *kwan-li-so* are often described as colonies because they are sprawling encampments, 20 or more miles long and 10 to 20 miles wide, containing multiple, enclosed, self-contained sections or “villages” for different categories of prisoners. Some of the sections are for the political prisoners; others are for the families of the presumed political offenders so that purged political prisoners have no contact with their imprisoned parents,

grandparents, or children. There are four known operational *kwan-li-so* in North Korea.

*Kyo-hwa-so* – long-term, felony-level penitentiaries and prison camps, where persons deemed to have committed felony-level criminal and political offenses are sent for fixed-term forced labor, often under very strict and brutal conditions. There are 24 to 26 known *kyo-hwa-so* camps in North Korea.

*Jip-kyul-so* – shorter-term, hard labor detention facilities for misdemeanor-level offenses, both criminal and political.

*Ro-dong-dan-ryon-dae* – mobile labor brigades, localized “labor training” facilities largely for repatriated North Koreans, set up originally because the numbers of repatriated North Koreans overwhelmed the *jip-kyul-so* detention facilities.

*Hyeok-myong-hwa-koo-yeok/Revolutionizing Zone(s)* – area in a political prison camp where prisoners may be sent if they are thought to be capable of “re-revolutionizing.” Prisoners go through re-education classes to make them more loyal to the Kim family regime and thus potentially suitable for release from prison.

*Wan-jeon-tong-je-koo-yeok/Total Control Zone(s)* – area in a political prison camp where no prisoners are intended to be released because they are deemed to be incapable of “re-revolutionizing.” Prisoners here typically have a lifetime incarceration and spend the rest of their lives doing a variety of forced labor, such as planting and harvesting food and tobacco, and raising pigs.

*Former prisoner* – a person who was detained in a prison camp in North Korea.

*Detainee* – a person currently in a prison camp in North Korea.

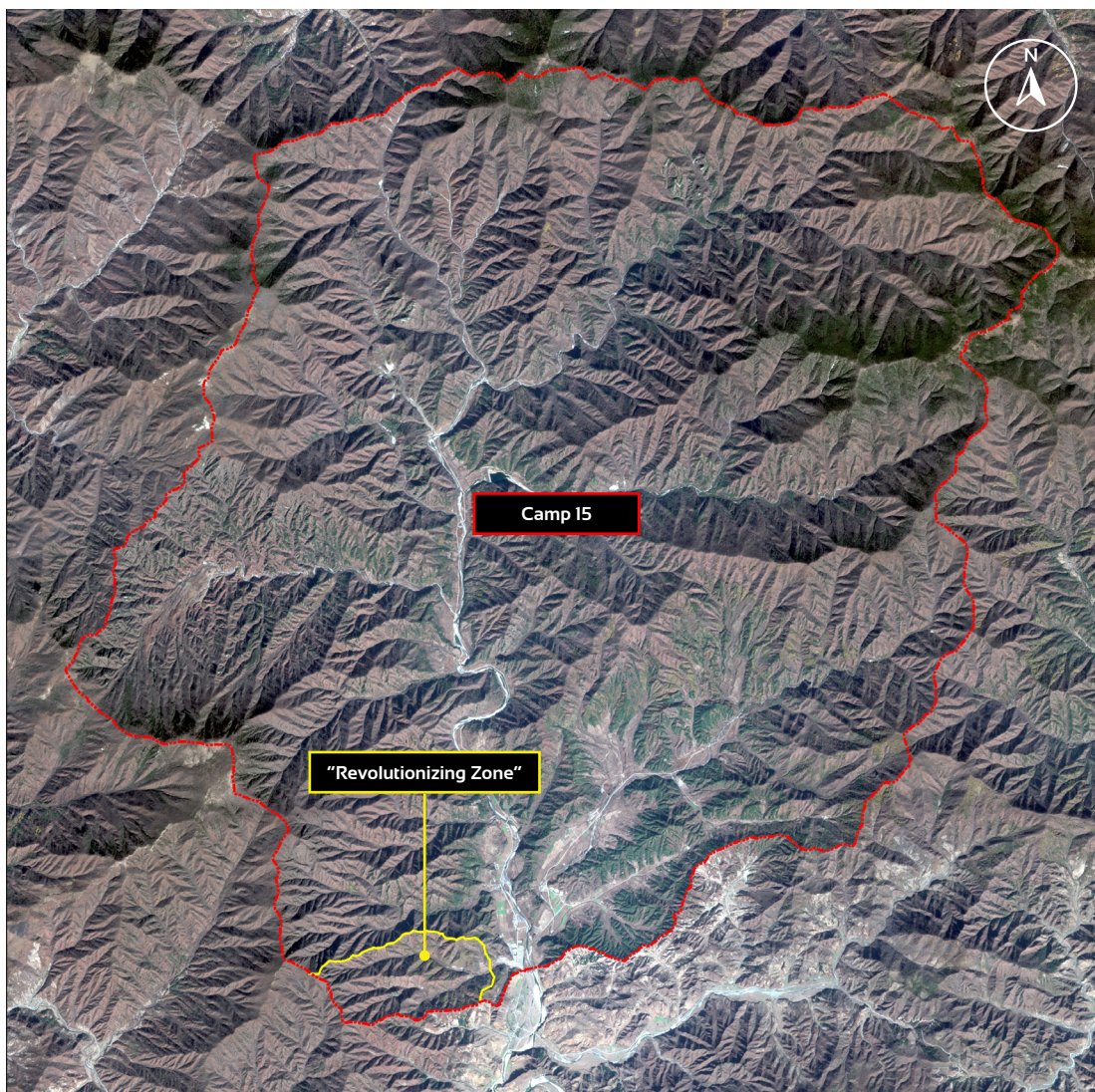
*Escapee* – a person who fled from North Korea.

*Raze* – The term used to describe when a structure is torn down or demolished; typically leveled to the ground.

*Pan-sharpened multispectral satellite imagery* – The process whereby a high-resolution panchromatic (e.g., grey-scale) image is merged with a lower resolution multispectral (e.g., color) imagery to create a single high-resolution color image.

*Camouflage, Concealment, Deception (CCD)* – A set of measures employed to limit an opponent’s ability to determine the size, scope, and intentions of a certain activity or location.

Figure 1



Camp 15 and the "Revolutionizing Zone"



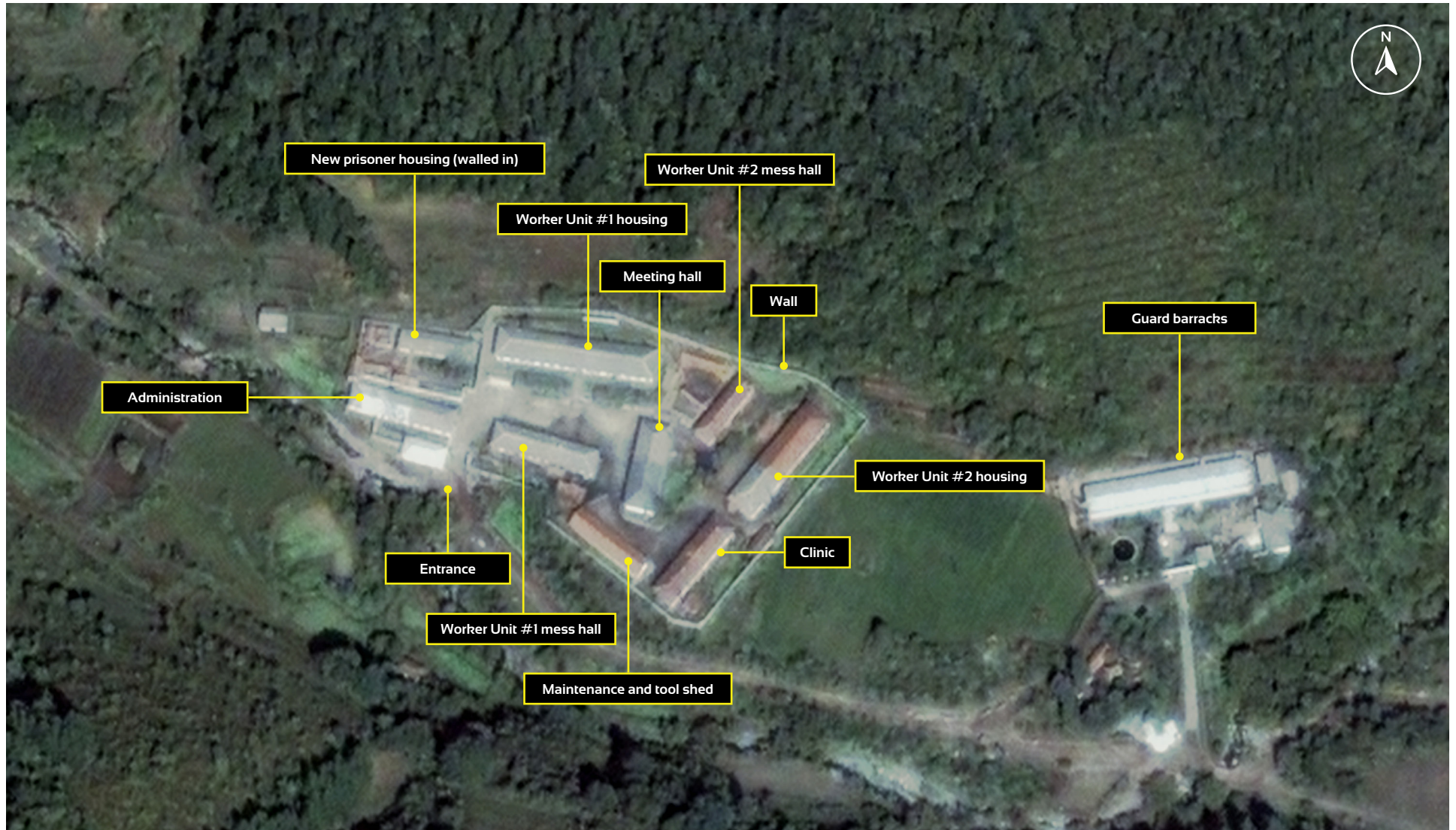
Figure 2



Major components within the Camp 15 "Revolutionizing Zone"



Figure 3



Components of the detainee facility in 2009



Figure 4



No significant changes were observed between August 2003 and April 2013



Figure 5



Clinic and Worker Unit #2 housing and mess hall razed between April and September 2013



Figure 6



Remaining buildings within the detainee facility razed between September 2013 and October 2014



Figure 7



Sixteen of the 20 buildings at the support facility were razed between September 2013 and October 2014



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