

Star Wars in Aleutians?

WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Department of Defense officials have informed Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski that intelligence gathering operations that would be part of the proposed Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) research program will be based in the Aleutian Islands.

Murkowski, a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, was informed of the proposal by Lt. Gen. James A. Abrahamson, Director of the SDI research program.

In a letter to Murkowski, Abrahamson said the Alaska military site at Shemya is proposed to participate in intelligence gathering activities involving KC-135 aircraft and infra-red sensors.

Murkowski said he was also informed that the Department of Defense is considering an expanded role for the Shemya military site to monitor Soviet ballistic missile testing "Alaska's geographical proximity to the Kamchatka Peninsula—the primary impact point for Soviet ballistic missile test flights—makes our state the optimum location for the proposed sensor experiments," Murkowski said.

He emphasized that "these programs will help put the United States in a better position in the future to make an informed decision on whether to actually deploy a strategic defense system."

Murkowski noted that this monitoring is consistent with the intelligence gathering role played by Alaska in support of arms control treaty verification.

Murkowski said the Optical Airborne Measurement Program (OAMP) involves the modification of

an existing hangar at Shemya to accommodate a specially equipped KC-135 aircraft, which will collect data on Soviet systems while flying off the coast of the Soviet Union. The aircraft will always operate in international airspace at a distance of more than 100 miles from Soviet territory, Murkowski said.

The Alaska senator said the Queen Match research program would also be located in Shemya, where a new rocket probe launch complex is being constructed. The program would involve launching a rocket containing an infra-red sensor system above the atmosphere to collect data on Soviet missiles being flight-tested into the Kamchatka Peninsula.

Murkowski wrote Abrahamson on October 31st after a story and drawings on SDI battle management in *The Washington Post* indicated "laser weapons" located in Alaska triggering the destruction of Soviet attack missiles.

In the letter, Murkowski asked if Alaska was under consideration as an SDI deployment site for laser weapons, or if Alaska would be involved in the future deployment of strategic defensive systems.

Abrahamson responded that the architectural studies "are theoretical at this point," but there "are also possibilities for ground-based radars or sensors located on aircraft which some day could stage out of Alaska."

"It is important to emphasize that these are anything but firm plans...at this point they represent theoretical locations and may never prove either desirable or cost-effective," Abrahamson added. "However, one day it is also possible that deployment of an SDI system would indeed involve many kinds of installations in many states, including Alaska."

"In the nearer term, the SKI research program has plans, and construction is underway, for some intelligence gathering operations in the Aleutians. Specifically, a hangar for our Optical Airborne Measurement Platform Aircraft and a launch facility for the Queen Match rocket probe are nearing completion on Shemya."