

# Age of the Arctic: an end to protective isolation?

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A recent article in the latest *Foreign Policy*, "The Age of the Arctic," by Oran R. Young, is bound to have profound impact on Alaska decision-makers in the years to come. Young, a political scientist, is director of the Center for Northern Studies in Wolcott, Vermont.

In his article, Young expounds on the Arctic region's growing importance to the strategic and economic well-being of the United States and the Soviet Union.

"It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the world is entering the age of the Arctic, an era in which those concerned with international peace and security will urgently need to know much more about the region and in which policymakers in the Arctic rim states will become increasingly concerned with Arctic affairs," writes Young.

As his arguments unfold, it is evident that Young engages in no rhetorical exercise when he stresses the Arctic card in the superpower struggle. Recent developments in military technology have thrust the region into a position of strategic primacy.

"It is hard to ignore the facts that the United States and the Soviet Union are immediate neighbors in the Arctic, that the shortest route between the two superpowers is across the North Pole, and that both superpowers front directly on the Arctic Basin," says Young, who also emphasizes that the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap, which consists of the Denmark Strait and the Norwegian Sea, is the main passageway to open ocean for the Soviet Northern Fleet.

"Already, Soviet SS-N-8 and SS-N-18 missiles mounted on Delta-class submarines can reach every major military target in North America and Western Europe without leaving Arctic patrol stations. Similarly, America Trident submarines carrying C-4

missiles can attack military targets throughout the Soviet Union from Arctic waters," Young points out early in the article.

Besides the considerable military importance of the area, Young points out that a major portion of the two nations' mineral wealth lies in the Arctic. Mentioned by Young are the vast oil and natural gas reserves on both sides of the Pole, the Red Dog Mine, and Alaska's huge coal deposits and hydropower potential.

Because of these resource treasures, vital to the superpowers' economic growth and mineral security, the Arctic is one of the world's most rapidly industrializing regions.

At odds with the rampant militarization and industrialization of the region are the concerns of the indigenous circumpolar peoples and weighty en-

tion resulting from OCS development.

The Arctic is also important to the entire global physical system, according to recent research on the "heat budget" of the region — created by the interaction of the ocean, sea ice and atmosphere — which could affect the climate of the entire earth.

Nor does Young fail to mention our stake in preserving marine mammal populations such as the bowhead whale and a polar bear.

Certainly none of this information is news to Alaskans, but its presentation in concise and coherent fashion makes for compelling reading, no less for the average Alaskan than for our legislators.

This valuable insight into the forces being brought to bear on the region now, and in the future, holds startling importance for Alaska Natives in

put from all segments of our society, and from other nations as well. Not ignored in this recommendation are existing organizations such as the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the University of Alaska's Geophysical Institute, and the Arctic Research Commission, whose value Young notes. In order to deal more effectively with the many emerging issues, however, Young recommends that Congress create a high-level council on Arctic policy, which he says should be located in the executive office of the president.

"A successful overhaul of U.S. Arctic policy," Young concludes, "must alleviate the current fragmentation of federal Arctic activities. It must strike key players as comprehensive rather than as subject to the control of domestic or foreign-policy interests. It must take into account the legitimate concerns of Arctic natives and non-native groups in Alaska. And new arrangements must be taken seriously by powerful members of Congress who follow Arctic issues."

Alaskans need to get in on the ground floor of such policy planning. Alaskans are on the front lines of whatever such policy will be; to fall back on the traditional Alaskan response — "We don't give a damn what's going on outside." — is to be forever relegated to a purely *reactive* role. We need to support the existing bodies devoted to Arctic policy and research, and should echo Mr. Young's call for more such efforts.

The message that the Arctic is growing increasingly less isolated, and much more subject to the desires and needs of powerful interests, though not entirely new, is one we will be discussing for some time to come.

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vironmental issues. Young rightly points out that ANCSA (the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) was "spurred" to passage by the desire to extract oil from Prudhoe Bay.

"These peoples are quickly grasping the importance of preserving their cultures," Young reminds us (though Alaska Natives certainly need no reminder), and "Arctic development is still destined to generate a steady stream of controversies concerning their place in a world full of advanced industrial societies."

Environmentally, Young points out the potential for severe potential environmental hazards in the Far North, due to the "mammoth scale" of Arctic development. The fragility of "certain key Arctic ecosystems" are increasingly jeopardized by problems such as Arctic haze and water pollu-

particular.

The issues of land protection, subsistence rights and cultural preservation are all intertwined with the arguments provided by Mr. Young, and they must be examined within this larger perspective before making a commitment to strategies which may turn out to be short-sighted or unrealistic. Above all, internecine conflicts must be avoided over *approach*, when the *goal* is commonly shared.

Young recommends that an Arctic Policy Agenda be established, with in-