

Alaska called strategically valuable

by Dave Elias

for the Tundra Times

Alaska has emerged as one of the world's most important strategic arenas, according to the director of the Center for Northern Studies.

Dr. Oran Young, head of the institute at Wolcott, Vermont, told the World Affairs Council in Anchorage this state has achieved that prominence because:

- Land-based missiles have become vulnerable to attack;
- President Reagan's Strategic

Defense Initiative — the so-called "Star Wars" system to destroy enemy satellites — has revived interest in manned bombers armed with cruise missiles;

— the Arctic offers a secure, safe environment for nuclear submarines; and,

— Arctic routes from Alaska to Russia and Europe are short.

According to Young, about half the Russian submarine fleet operates in the Arctic, and acoustic detection of those boats is difficult because of constantly shifting pack ice.

An additional military advantage to the Arctic, according to Young, is that

military operations here are "out of the public eye" because relatively few people inhabit the northern regions.

Because of renewed interest in polar air space, the relatively obsolete Distant Early Warning line radar facilities may be upgraded, he said.

Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union are developing a new generation of high endurance bombers which will play important roles in both offense and defense, according to Young.

And, he said, the security of weapons delivery systems should make both nations feel more confident, a situation that could lead to reduction in the number of missiles each

maintains.

Predicting federal concerns regarding the Arctic will increase during the next five to 10 years, he said developments here could "extend the arms race into new and unfamiliar arenas."

According to Young, there will be a continuing need to consider arms control, and there may be friction with Norway and Canada because those nations fear being drawn into an arms race and becoming part of this nation's polar defense system.

He also noted movements in Iceland and Greenland that would make those nations nuclear-free.