

Interviewing History: Dr. James Schlesinger, Former Secretary of Defense

On March 30, 2009, Mark Irvine, *research assistant, Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project*, Jennifer Bovair, *program manager and research associate, Energy and National Security Program*, Brian Harding, *research associate, International Security Program*, and Kristin Wedding, *corporate relations manager, Office of Strategic Planning*, interviewed former *Secretary of Defense* Dr. James Schlesinger



about his pivotal role in the 1971 Cannikin nuclear test on Amchitka Island, Alaska. During his tenure as *Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission*, Dr. Schlesinger presided over the detonation of the Cannikin test, the largest underground nuclear test in U.S. history.

Over the course of the evening, Dr. Schlesinger discussed decision-making in the face of significant opposition. He elaborated on the importance of putting national security first when serving as part of the defense establishment. Dr. Schlesinger also commented on the major challenges the next generation of leaders face in managing nuclear weapons.



“I’ve had many privileges during my time at CSIS, but perhaps none greater than the opportunity to participate in the Interviewing History dinner with Dr. Schlesinger. Through this experience, I learned a great deal about many subjects outside of my usual purview, formed lasting friendships with my teammates, and had the opportunity to interact with one of the United States’ most accomplished public servants.”

– Brian Harding, *member, Team Schlesinger*