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Nixon Visits China III

Lead: Vigorous anti-communism had built Richard Nixon's career. As President he found he had to do business with his old opponents.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: President Nixon had a favorite saying, "when you have a reputation as an early riser, you can sleep late on occasion." By the time he became President in 1969, few doubted Richard Nixon's anti-communism. He was cold warrior of great repute. Yet,

he faced tough problems which required the cooperation of those whom during most of his career he had condemned as enemies.

In March, 1969 the new President outlined his view of the world. There were limits to American power, he said. The United States could no longer solely maintain the peace throughout the world. It was now up to those directly threatened by communism to carry more of the burden of their own defense. The United States would provide advice, support and matériel, but a new day had dawned and under this, the so-called Nixon Doctrine, America would confine itself to logistic and economic support and only on

rare occasions would the United States commit its troops to fight. By the early 1970s it was clear the Vietnam War could not be won given the way the United States had restricted itself. North Vietnam had proven itself a tenacious enemy which would stop at nothing short of total victory. Nixon and his advisor, Henry Kissinger, believed they needed the help of Communist China and the Soviet Union to cool down the Vietnam War long enough for Nixon to pull out U.S. ground forces with at least a fraction of the national honor still intact.

Nixon began on two tracks. First, he turned over the war effort on the ground to the South Vietnamese Army

and second, he began secret negotiations with both the Soviets and the Chinese Communist leaders, seeking their help in persuading Hanoi to negotiate a peace agreement.

Nixon had other reasons for reaching out. The U.S. economy was in serious trouble and the prospect of expanded trade with these two old adversaries was attractive. He was also about to run for a second term. A foreign policy coup might add luster to his record and help insure his re-election. Next time: Nixon goes to China.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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