



Ask Not for Whom The Bell Tolls

William Rusher

THE WORLD is now being prepared for the fall of Phnom Penh and the anti-Communist government of Cambodia, and it is instructive to note how decorously it is all being handled. The sense of loss, of terrible and (above all) wholly unnecessary defeat, is carefully muted.

There is a sort of grim comfort in all this for Americans. If and when this nation itself falls, we may be sure that the final scenes will be almost painless.

Then, as now, there will be nothing in the least inevitable about the catastrophe: The fall of the United States will grow, as the fall of Cambodia has grown, out of a fatal defect of will — nothing more.

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FROM time to time somebody declares that our failure in the Southeast Asian war "proves that America cannot always have its way"; but in fact it proves no such thing.

There has never been a day when the United States could not have asserted its will decisively over the entire peninsula and settled the region's fate. But we chose instead to dither, and to try to get by with half measures; and so our policy, and our ally, have come to this pitiful end amid the shell-pocked marketplaces of Phnom Penh.

So, I suspect, it will be with us. I doubt very much that the will to use our weapons, in our own defense any more than in Cambodia's, exists any longer in this country. Oh, to be sure there are individual leaders who would try to rally resistance; but the occasion will never seem quite ripe, until it is much too late. Besides, the final test is, some way off yet, for America itself.

Still, one doesn't need a very sensitive nose to detect the odor of irresolution, hopelessness and just plain indifference rising these days from the moral and political swamps of the Western world.

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AMERICA won't really "fall"; it will merely collapse inward upon itself. And the funeral directors will be standing by, ready to facilitate the process with taste and decorum. "Don't weep too much; it was inevitable. The America you and I knew was long since gone, anyway. The old order changeth. Perhaps it's for the best."

We will sign the title-deeds of our freedom over to some hand-rubbing receiver in bankruptcy almost relieved not to have to struggle another day.

So watch the death-agony of Cambodia carefully, and do not send to know for whom the bell tolls.