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Malaysia-Fundamentalist

THINK TANKER WARNED WASHINGTON AGAINST SIDING WITH ANWAR SUPPORTERS

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 16 (Bernama) -- The United States, which has had two unpleasant experiences with radical Islamic fundamentalist rule in Iran and Afghanistan, has been warned it could be fooled the third time if it supports effort by former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to destabilise the Malaysian government.

Amy Ridenour, president of the National Center for Public Policy Research, a non-partisan American think tank, said Anwar has close links to radical Islamic fundamentalists and has begun an international public relations effort to destabilise the Malaysian government.

In a commentary piece published by the Washington Times newspaper Wednesday, Ridenour said Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail visited the U.S. recently to draw support for her husband, who is now serving a 15-year jail sentence for corruption and sodomy.

"The effort pits Anwar against his former mentor Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad. The rivalry has caused political upheaval. Betting that Americans would be sympathetic to a woman whose husband is in prison, lobbyists controlled by her husband orchestrated the trip," she said.

Giving Anwar's background, she said his political history began as a student activist at the University of Malaya in the 1960's where he began to make fiery speeches about Islam both inside and beyond the university.

Ridenour said Anwar then founded the Angkatan Belia Islam (ABIM), the fundamentalist Islamic youth movement, which aimed to generate an Islamic movement as a path to Islamic revival in Malaysia.

She noted that Anwar travelled to Iran to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini who led Iran's Islamic revolution and ABIM -- taking a page each from Karl Marx and the screed of radical Islam -- denounced labour exploitation and "all things repugnant to the spirit of Islamic justice".

"Since Anwar's jailing in 1999, fundamentalist Islamic student groups have taken control of student unions at most universities, and anti-government activities have resulted.

"On June 29, for instance, suspected arson destroyed a building at the University of Malaya. The Islamic Party of Malaysia has gained seats in parliament," she said.

Ridenour recalled that Khomeini's rule in 1979 began with a 444-day hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in Teheran and the U.S. learned the hard way that there was no way to negotiate, compromise or even talk with a leader as implacably opposed to democracy and tolerance as Khomeini.

Ridenour said Afghanistan reinforced that lesson. After the U.S. poured millions of dollars and vital intelligence to the anti-Soviet Mujahiddin, an Islamic fundamentalist government, the Taliban, took power.

The Taliban is profoundly anti-American, openly sheltering the world's most notorious international terrorist, Osama bin Laden, whose 1998 terrorist bombings of two U.S. embassies killed 224 people.

"The Taliban has fashioned a regime far less tolerant than anything Leonid Breznev ever imagined -- a dictatorship of the clerics that revels in the destruction of irreplaceable ancient cultural Buddhist masterpieces as it publicly flogs a woman accused of walking in public with a man who is not a relative.

"The United States would do well to avoid a third experience," she warned.

Ridenour also praised Malaysia for making extraordinary strides in its development as a prosperous, stable and democratic nation.

" Malaysia is enjoying impressive economic growth, with annual 5 percent to 10 percent gross domestic product increases over the last decade. In the ranking of Asian economies, its per capita GDP of approximately US\$7,370 (RM28,000) is immediately behind South Korea's and ahead of seven others," she said.

Malaysia is also America's 12th largest trading partner and its 17th largest export market with U.S.-Malaysia trade exceeding U.S. trade with India, Indonesia and Russia combined.

" Malaysia is not perfect. The Malaysian legal system, like America's, is based on English common law, but some abuses have been alleged," Ridenour said.

She also noted that it is a tragedy of history that dictators often seize power by exploiting popular movements, including Fidel Castro's Cuba, Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua and Khomeini's Iran.

Ridenour concluded her commentary by saying: " The United States was fooled in Iran and Afghanistan. It would be dangerous to be fooled again."

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