

Anwar's success in getting bipartisan support
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COMMENT "A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," wrote non-violent civil rights leader Martin Luther King in a famous letter from a Birmingham jail in Alabama in 1963.

By dint of that measure of universal concern, former US vice-president Al Gore joined former deputy secretary of defence Paul Wolfowitz in penning an op-ed piece in yesterday's edition of the Wall Street Journal.

The article called on the Obama administration to weigh in on the Anwar Ibrahim sodomy trial.

azlanGore and Wolfowitz are politicians from different hues of the ideological spectrum in the US. One is a liberal Democrat and the other a neo-conservative Republican.

Their joint call for an end to quiet diplomacy, if any, and for a public pronouncement by the US State Department on the Anwar trial is a display of bipartisanship reminiscent of past debates about US foreign policy in which august members of both parties abandoned reflexive partisanship in favour of a stance of broad – and liberal – internationalism.

Not since the 1970s when the human rights campaign of dissident Soviet nuclear physicist and Nobel Peace laureate Andre Sakharov troubled the Kremlin has a human rights issue like the sodomy trial of Anwar Ibrahim reverberated in US foreign policy circles and led to bipartisan calls for support for a beleaguered individual.

The op-ed, in any one of the three prominent dailies of the US – the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post – has become the 'must read' of the ruling establishment, a stature comparable to an editorial ('leader' in journalism's parlance) in the Times of London at the height of the British imperium between the mid-19th century and the Second World War.

The power of the op-ed resides in its ability to reverberate in the minds of readers long after the last sentence has been forgotten.

Busy executives of the US power elite read them with their toast each morning. The more powerful ones have a digest of salient articles presented to them by their aides before they get down to the business of the day.

In sum, the op-ed is a lever of major influence on policy direction in US foreign policy circles.

In those circles Anwar has succeeded in gaining attention as a leader with profound potential to impact on a world-historical issue: whether Islam is compatible with democracy in Muslim majority nations.

No need for paid consultants

Gore and Wolfowitz implicitly recognise this ability of Anwar's and in their op-ed urge the Obama administration not to scant a grand opportunity to engage the Muslim world through supporting leaders of vaunted democratic credentials.

The Obama administration has vowed to engage with Muslim nations in a sharp break with its predecessor's policies that were felt to have generated hostility and suspicion between the West and the Muslim world.

Gore and Wolfowitz urge support for Anwar while acknowledging that there are differences of opinion on an array of issues between Anwar and them.

But this, they suggest, is an effect of healthy political pluralism which is preferable to a single voice over a million solitudes - Albert Camus' definition of tyranny in the modern age.

Anwar's success at gaining the bipartisan support of a liberal democratic icon and a neo-conservative luminary bespeaks his ability at bridging ideological and political gulfs, like he has done in Malaysian politics where he is the glue that binds the avowedly secular DAP with a theocratic leaning PAS.

In the US, he has achieved that without the assistance of highly-paid consultants like Apco Worldwide, the communications advisers to the Najib administration.

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