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**The Face of America
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I usually define myself as, first, a human being and a global citizen, committed to human rights for all. Second, a Palestinian Arab with American attributes. And third, a woman, conscious of that additional layer of discrimination with which women struggle, whatever their race, creed, or economic status.

The president-elect's unfolding appointments to the cabinet and other top posts have turned these self-definitions upside down. The human rights advocate in me should be focused on how to make a strong case for the application of international law at home and abroad to counter the pragmatic approach that seems to be the new team's common bond.

Yet I can't help relating to the emerging Obama team in ethnic, gender, and cultural terms - even though I take issue with organizations that promote members of their ethnic group, religion or gender irrespective of whether or not those members' politics promote human rights.

For example, I feel a deep sense of pride and joy at the fact that three black Americans have been appointed out of the 13 cabinet and top posts announced by mid week. Black Americans have taught me - and the world - so much about how to work for peace and justice, and it feels good to see them well represented.

And two of the three black Americans are women, which also feels good. Although, speaking of women, I can't help noticing women appointees remain a minority so far, albeit a large one. Is half still too much to hope for?

But here's my main concern. Maybe I've missed something, and of course he's not

done yet, but I haven't seen an Arab American appointee on Obama's team - not even a hint of one on the horizon. Ditto for Muslim Americans.

The Latino community - whose votes delivered key states to the Democrats - just got their cabinet-level appointee, for whom they lobbied hard. Like the Latinos, the Arab and Muslim American communities turned out in record numbers and helped swing key states Obama's way, including Michigan, Virginia, and Ohio.

The performance of American Muslims was especially striking during this election. Muslim Americans number more than seven million, while Arab Americans number around three million. (Most Arab Americans are Christians, although Islam is a major component of Arab culture whatever the religious background). An unprecedented 95% of eligible Muslim American voters turned out, with around 89% voting for Obama.

Perhaps Arab American and Muslim American organizations did not lobby hard enough post-election? Or perhaps politicians still prefer to tiptoe around both communities?

In recent years, a few Arab Americans have made it to the top tier - energy secretary during George W. Bush's first term, secretary of health and human services during the Clinton years, and chief of staff during Bush senior's term.

Maybe it's unrealistic to expect that an Arab American would make it into every cabinet. It is a relatively small community. And, although there is a large pool of highly qualified professionals, the pool of those engaged in politics is much smaller.

But the top tier of government is what most represents the face of America to the world and to other Americans, giving them models to emulate and a stake in the system. America is one of the few countries where diversity can - and, increasingly, does - go all the way to the top. In spite of my affinity for Europe, I cannot imagine a person of color leading any European country, at least not in my lifetime.

The human rights piece of me is focused on promoting a more progressive agenda for America. Yet it is with a sense of wistfulness, not to say exclusion, that I follow the news about the top appointments. Doubtless some Arab Americans and/or Muslim Americans will be appointed as assistant secretaries and department directors. But it's not the same as being part of the most visible face of America.

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