




Steele Galvanizes Neocon Hawks

Steele's July 1 remarks, caught on camera  and posted on the web, did include a stretching of the truth to say that the war in Afghanistan "was a war of Obama's choosing. This is not something the United States has actively prosecuted or wanted to engage in." The war, of course, began shortly after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, under President George W. Bush. Nevertheless, Steele is correct insofar as Obama both campaigned on ramping up the Afghan war and followed through on it after assuming office — long after it had become obvious to everyone but the neoconservative hawks who are now out for Steele's shiny scalp that the war is unwinnable.

Referring to President Obama, Steele said, "If he's such a student of history, has he not understood that, you know, that's the one thing you don't do is engage in a land war in Afghanistan? All right? Because everyone who's tried, over a thousand years of history, has failed. And there are reasons for that. There are other ways to engage in Afghanistan."

Steele is, of course, correct on that count ([ask the British](#) and the former Soviets), which is the real reason the neocons are out to get him. Mistakenly attributing a disastrous Bush war to Obama is a pardonable offense; accurately characterizing it as a disaster is not.

Thus, leading neocon Bill Kristol of the *Weekly Standard* [called for Steele's resignation](#), saying that Steele's "comment is more than an embarrassment. It's an affront, both to the honor of the Republican party and to the commitment of the soldiers fighting to accomplish the mission they've been asked to take on by our elected leaders."

"There are, of course, those who think we should pull out of Afghanistan, and they're certainly entitled to make their case," continued Kristol. "But one of them shouldn't be the chairman of the Republican party."

In other words, the head of the GOP must always support whatever foolish, misguided policies a Republican President initiates, even long after that President has left office. He is never entitled to an opinion of his own; he must be a company man.

Liz Cheney, daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, the primary architect of Bush's foreign policy, joined the anti-Steele chorus, [telling the Huffington Post](#), "RNC Chairman Michael Steele's comments about the war in Afghanistan were deeply disappointing and wrong. The chairman of the Republican party must be unwavering in his support for American victory in the war on terror — a victory that cannot be accomplished if we do not prevail in Afghanistan."

The Afghan war has now lasted longer than the United States' previous unconstitutional debacle in Vietnam, and it is just about as successful. As in Vietnam, U.S. troops are increasingly seen as foreign



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 4, 2010

invaders, while those opposing them are viewed by fellow Afghans as freedom fighters, trying to repel the foreign hordes. Hamid Karzai's government is considered a tool of the Americans, not a legitimate native government, and it has little to no power.

Steele seems to recognize these realities, while Kristol, Cheney, and other neocons do not. To them, there is no limit to the amount of American blood and treasure that should be poured into any foreign adventure, no matter how long it takes to achieve that elusive "victory" or how deeply into debt the United States goes.

Steele later backpedaled on his remarks, arguing for continuing the "war on terror" until the U.S. attains "success in Afghanistan." He did not, however, retreat from his assertion that Afghanistan is Obama's war, the one thing in his original remarks that was to some degree false.

"Politics stops at the water's edge" is by now a hackneyed expression, but the response to Steele's comments shows that it is still true to a large degree. Both parties agree on the need for constant U.S. intervention in foreign countries — the Democratic National Committee chairman piled on Steele, too — regardless of the consequences. They may quibble about the details of how the interventions are carried out, but aside from a few anomalies like Ron Paul, they concur that the world would descend into chaos without continual application of Uncle Sam's big stick. If only the RNC chairman had possessed nerves of Steele, his remarks might have opened the door for a real debate about U.S. foreign policy and a new appreciation for John Quincy Adams's advice that America not go "abroad, in search of monsters to destroy."

Photo of Michael Steele: AP Images



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