



It's hard to look at this week cover of Time and not want to remain in Afghanistan. That was probably the magazine's intention.

But let's do a quick cost-benefit analysis here. I have [argued elsewhere](#) that we could save far more women from repression, violence, and brutality by taking all the money and effort we are currently using in Afghanistan, and fighting the sex trade, forced prostitution, slavery (still victimizing 27 million people worldwide), and the degradation of extreme poverty — and not get thousands of US soldiers killed in the process.

Now let's push on the environmental angle. Climate skeptics and foot-draggers argue that carbon regulation is just too expensive for us. But it will be less expensive than a protracted, bloody, unwinnable war in Afghanistan — which most of them support. So what's the difference?

I suppose that one could argue that the difference is that in Afghanistan, you have a group of genuinely evil people oppressing women (and just about everyone else). Climate change, on the other hand, is just “happening.” And I suppose that’s true in some sense.

But is it important enough? To use [Model Penal Code](#) terms, the Taliban are acting “purposefully” to oppress people, and by not doing something about it, we are acting “knowingly.” With climate change, **we** are acting knowingly to destroy the planet, and acting knowingly (or at least recklessly) by refusing to do something about it. (The “refraining” from doing something about climate change is a case of “pseudo-nonfeasance” because we created the risk in the first place; it is similar to a driver “refraining” from applying her brakes at the right time.).

Note also that those who stand to be harmed most viciously by climate change are also the world’s most impoverished and oppressed people. Jared Diamond argues in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* that the Rwandan genocide was caused in large measure by an ecological crisis: it is highly probable that climate impacts will also yield violence, ethnic conflict, and genocide, and the world’s poorest will once again be the victims.

Is the difference between knowingly refraining from action to stop brutal oppressors so much worse than continuing to knowingly destroy the planet and injure the world’s most vulnerable populations (not to mention future generations)? It doesn’t seem so to me. It seems quite strange to make such a sharp distinction. Nevertheless, a large portion of the US policymaking elite confidently states that it is “necessary” to do something about the Taliban (even though the geopolitical case is far from being shown) yet it is “too expensive” to do something about climate. The burden on them is to show why their clear, sharp distinction holds any water.