

## Dr Paul Stott



Head of Security and Extremism [Read Full Bio](#)

[More posts by the Author »](#)

## Related Content

No related posts.

# 20 years on from 9/11, are we still funding those who mock us?

Sep 10, 2021



The anniversary of 9/11 routinely invokes reflective articles, considering both the day itself, and the war on terror which followed. This year's twentieth anniversary would have formed a significant landmark, but the Taliban's military victory in Afghanistan, and what it infers about American power, appears less a landmark, more a rupture. If media reports are to be believed, the Taliban is set to hold an inauguration ceremony on Saturday 11 September, thumbing its nose at commemorative events in the United States and elsewhere.

If the Taliban is deliberately trolling the West from Afghanistan, we have our own jokers closer to home. Consider the "People's Tribunal on Crimes of Aggression: Afghanistan Sessions" organised by the Anglo-Romanian Bezna Theatre group, and held at the Camden People's Theatre from 9-11 September. Behind its Maoist sounding title is the familiar desire to combine theatre and politics, this time to hold a series of mock court hearings designed to "artistically shift the focus onto the crimes of the UK state." Enthusiastic coverage has followed in The Guardian, describing how "a people's tribunal – of actors, human rights experts, witnesses and citizen judges – is staging a trial of the invasion." Tickets for the Camden event, which is being livestreamed globally, are free.

In the disputed fields of terrorism, counter-terrorism and public opinion, money counts. It is used to both furnish armed campaigns, but just as importantly fight the propaganda wars which inevitably follow. In Afghanistan, the United States frittered away billions that appears to have been lost largely to corruption and theft. By 2014, it had spent **more** in the country than it had invested in the post WW2 Marshall Plan, with very different results. In the chaotic rush to leave, everything from biometric security equipment to military vehicles were gifted to the Taliban. Whilst UK public funds may not have taken such a hit, we now appear to be frittering away money in arts grants and Covid bailouts to theatres, who wish to put the country on trial for..... overthrowing the Taliban and attacking Al-Qaeda. The Camden People's Theatre receives annual unrestricted funding from the Arts Council England, was granted Covid related financial support, and the Arts Council has part-funded Bezna's 'People's Tribunal'. Those free tickets don't just print themselves.

There is also a very simple problem with styling the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 as criminal. Far from being a "crime of aggression", a military response to 9/11 was both justified and logical. Decisive action removed from power a Taliban government guilty of serial human rights abuses, and on whose soil Al-Qaeda had prepared the most devastating terror attacks in history. 3000 people had lost their lives, including 67 innocent British civilians. American and British forces closed Al-Qaeda training camps where further terrorist outrages were being planned. This should be central to any assessment of that period. Instead, the "People's Tribunal" possesses a very different starting point, seeking to put the UK on trial.

As with any good pantomime, the Bezna Theatre Group casts some familiar characters. The play's creators have worked with "human rights academics" from the International State Crime Initiative at Queen Mary University of London. Given the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, human rights academics might be expected to be working flat out at the moment, but it seems there is still time to squeeze in a critique of the West's actions. There are also two genuine ugly sisters in the shape of Moazzam Begg and Asim Qureshi from the organisation CAGE – the latter best known for **describing** Islamic State executioner Mohammed Emwazi (Jihadi John) as a 'beautiful young man.' At the time of 9/11, Moazzam Begg was living in Taliban controlled Afghanistan, having decided to move to the Islamic Emirate with his family. Rather than criticising the British or American response in 2001, perhaps a degree of self-reflection about the wisdom of his own actions in that period, would be wise?

In a liberal democracy, Begg, Qureshi, Bezna, human rights academics and the Camden People's Theatre are perfectly free to express their opinions. There is no law against potentially acting in bad taste, holding views many consider to be naïve, or politically

flawed. By now, we expect little different from CAGE. It is the idea of public money making these events possible, and assisting their dissemination, that is an insult to the victims of 9/11. They, and we, deserve better from the Arts Council England.

**Dr Paul Stott is the Head of Security and Extremism at Policy Exchange**

---

## Dr Paul Stott



Head of Security and Extremism *Read Full Bio*

[More posts by the Author »](#)

## Related Content

No related posts.

## Stay Up To Date

[Join Our Mailing List](#)

[The Exchange Podcast](#)

## Support Us

[Support Our Work](#)

## Policy Projects

[Wolfson Economics Prize 2021](#)

[Britain In The World](#)