

# Why should we dump the bomb?

## Analysing The Moral Maze

The Moral Maze, 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2009

**Michael Burke**  
So, why should we dump the bomb? That's our moral maze tonight. Our Panel, Melanie Phillips, social commentator on the Daily Mail, Claire Fox from the Institute of Ideas, the Catholic writer Clifford Longley and Kenan Malik the neurobiologist who works on the Frontiers of Science, Behaviour and Politics.

**Melanie Phillips**  
1 If it were ever to come to the point where a nuclear armed power was threatening this country with a nuclear weapon I think that there would be a moral case for using it.  
**Clifford Longley**  
2 As a result of the end of the Cold War none of those (original) justifications any longer mean we can keep nuclear weapons.

**Claire Fox**  
3 The type of weapons is not a moral issue. 4 Nuclear weapons have only been used once by the United States. I consider that to be an act of terrorism, mass murder and immoral.  
**Kenan Malik**  
5 The role of Trident is not to defend Britain but to project Britain as a global power; such delusions of grandeur can and have been hugely damaging for people across the world. 6 It also thinks that in the abstract there is no distinction difference between conventional and nuclear weapons. 7 I do think that the mass indiscriminate killing of civilians [...] through conventional or nuclear weapons is morally indefensible.

**Michael Burke**  
8 First witness is Rebecca Johnson who's Director of the Lobby Group called the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy. Aren't you worried that we might be less secure if we gave up nuclear weapons?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
9 No, I don't think that they play any convincing role in our security. 7 (nuclear weapons) would kill hundreds of thousands of people and the environment [...] potentially our human gene pool for ages to come.  
**Michael Burke**  
7 What do you think nuclear weapons being used would be a disaster.  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
8 It is whether you can keep possessing, amassing and advertising that nuclear weapons are indispensable for our security and not have them used at some point. 9 It's very important that we're promoting non-proliferation but not the kind of that equates [...] to 14 disarmament options by [...].  
**Melanie Phillips**  
10 I would follow if we were to give up our own nuclear weapons?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
11 We would be able to demonstrate that you can renounce a weapon on which you thought you relied on for your security. 18 Britain can show [...]. Lower of projection as a permanent member of the Security Council and a depository of the Non Proliferation Treaty.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
17, 18 What effect do you think that would have on rogue states, which are armed with nuclear weapons?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
19 It would help to devalue nuclear weapons. 14 A country like Iran may be [...] in an option for nuclear weapons [...] because it perceives it's power projection. 10 so by our devaluing both the power and the status attached to nuclear weapons 18 as well as recognizing that militarily they are unusable and they do not contribute to our security this would 2 change the nature of the debate internationally.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
2 This is your aspiration, this is your hope that Iran or whoever - Korea, would take notice, but 9 you have no evidence that at all.  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
19 History's shown that when [...] a certain number of countries renounce weapons which we have come to recognize because their indiscriminate effects on civilians are inhumane and then [...] promote the disarmament for everybody they can have really powerful effects.

**Melanie Phillips**  
20 We were to get rid of Trident [...] you would be absolutely certain that Iran would no longer be developing its nuclear weapon? 14 Would it not be the most unconvincible risk to take?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
8 we begin as the smallest country for whom nuclear weapons really do not play a critical role.  
**Claire Fox**  
30 Do you think that any type of weapons, however powerful cause war?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
24 I think that the resources that are currently put into these nuclear weapons could be much better spent.  
**Claire Fox**  
29 That's a pragmatic argument whether the military should spend any money over there, not over here, that's not 8 You've said already that [...] nuclear weapons have never played a significant role in terms of security. 16 In fact, arguably, they've got nothing to do with military power at all 11, 32 it's more about the projection of power.

**Rebecca Johnson**  
32 I think that's right, 31 I think it's a political instrument  
**Claire Fox**  
28 Don't the problem politics, 26 not the morality of a type of weapon?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
33 It's about the [moral] choices that we make as a society. 25 we cannot play a moral role in the world if we are saying that our security depends on our using or threatening to use nuclear weapons.  
**Claire Fox**  
27 So you're saying it's good for Britain PR if we play this, get rid of this [nuclear weapon].  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
27 I'm not saying that. 6 I'm saying that Britain has played a role in the acquisition of nuclear weapons. 4 We have to take a leadership role in building back down again. 3 We cannot keep pointing the finger hypocritically and say "We rely on these for our security because we can't be trusted with them, you can't, Iran, you can't North Korea, you can't that trigger over there".

**Melanie Phillips**  
19 Do you not recognise the difference between Iran and us?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
21 There isn't a difference between British people and the Iranian people  
**Melanie Phillips**  
22, 23 Do you not understand the difference between defence and aggression?  
**Rebecca Johnson**  
22, 23 I do understand the difference between defence and aggression. 1, 13 You can't expect any other country to disarm if we don't. 12 Britain makes a harder by presenting that it would be prepared to spend billions [...] on a nuclear weapons system because it's regarded as independent of our security. That message makes it much harder for those of us that are trying to get all those countries to give up their nuclear weapons and their nuclear ambitions and aspirations.

**Michael Burke**  
Our next witness is Professor David Conway who is a philosopher and now Senior Research Fellow at Civitas, the think tank. 4 Is there a moral argument for having nuclear weapons?  
**David Conway**  
1 There is no moral case for the use of nuclear weapons. First or second strike.  
**Michael Burke**  
2 How, then, can there be a moral case for having nuclear weapons?  
**David Conway**  
3 By virtue of (us) having nuclear weapons and 11 (us) being prepared to use them (on others) 7 they serve as a deterrent against their use and 3 thereby they do preserve peace.  
**Kenan Malik**  
4, 11 Deterrent surely only effective if you're willing to use the weapons?  
**David Conway**  
11 Yes.  
**Kenan Malik**  
1, 10 You just said you are not willing to use it. 18 If you're in charge of Britain's nuclear arsenal, 15 Britain is not going to use it and therefore 7 deterrent fails immediately.  
**David Conway**  
17, of course, am not personally on a Trident submarine. 12 People on the submarine and in the MOD have to be prepared to use them and 16 can be morally entitled to be prepared in that way and 12 even to let themselves go to sea in the event that they receive the instruction 8 in the belief that by doing so 10 by it being apparent to any potential aggressor that they are so prepared, 7 that the use against us of those weapons will be prevented.

**Kenan Malik**  
23 What you're saying is that you're happy for somebody else to take the moral responsibility for mass killing?  
**David Conway**  
22 [...] I would be prepared to serve on a [nuclear submarine]. 20 As a matter of principle it's perfectly morally permissible (to be prepared to use nuclear weapons). 21 It is actually to be applauded that there are people prepared to spend months in a submarine in order to enable you and I to have these pleasant discussions in security.  
**Kenan Malik**  
14 But what they have to be (morally) capable of doing and make a moral argument for the mass indiscriminate killings of civilians?  
**David Conway**  
11 By virtue of being prepared to, 8 they are able to believe that they won't have to use it by virtue of their believing that they won't have to use it as a result of being prepared to, 11 that enables them to be prepared to.

**Clifford Longley**  
5 we've recently heard the argument from Cardinal O'Brien that it's immoral to intend to do something that is immoral to do. You think he's wrong?  
**David Conway**  
6 Yes (he is wrong). 6 Supposing we did morally disarm and that then left ourselves exposed to some aggressor who attacked us. 4 I think we would be complicit in having encouraged them to do so.  
**Clifford Longley**  
12 The captain of the submarine has to launch his missiles. Now you have to have him ready to do that.  
**David Conway**  
12 Yes.  
**Clifford Longley**  
14 [They] have to be able to kill hundreds of thousands of people and you've got to go through with it.  
**David Conway**  
8 This combine that preparedness with a belief, a belief which I think to be correct but that by virtue of that, having that preparedness they won't ever have to act on it.  
**Clifford Longley**  
13 what they're going to do absolutely drive a coach and horses through such just war principles as proportionality doesn't it?  
**David Conway**  
6 No, it's not [...] because [...] they haven't done it.  
**Clifford Longley**  
13 [...] the submarine captain receives his signal and has to carry it through. Are you saying he stops at that point?  
**David Conway**  
No what I have said is that 11 by virtue of their being prepared, 8 is their belief and my belief they will never receive that signal.

**Michael Burke**  
Our next witness is Professor Mike Clark who's Director of the Royal United Services Institute and was one of the authors of the public's latest review by the Institute of Public Policy research which recommends keeping the deterrent for the time being. Would you as an individual go further?  
**Mike Clark**  
1 I'm quite happy to go down a road that would lead to nuclear disarmament.  
**Michael Burke**  
Would that be for pragmatic, strategic or moral reasons?  
**Mike Clark**  
2, 3 I think you can make them from all three.  
**Kenan Malik**  
4 It can't be a very strong moral argument against nuclear weapons if you are able to compromise it so easily for pragmatic reasons.  
**Mike Clark**  
5 I can be much more politically pragmatic now because I think it is beginning to lead somewhere.  
**Kenan Malik**  
7 But isn't one of the points about holding a moral position that you wish to win over people to that position?  
**Mike Clark**  
7 Indeed.  
**Kenan Malik**  
8 If you say you're going to compromise your moral position because other people believe differently, that seems to undermine the very argument about why you should hold moral positions.  
**Mike Clark**  
5 I don't mind how we get towards nuclear disarmament. If we get there through a series of 2 moral compromises and political 3 pragmatic actions, I settle for that.

**Kenan Malik**  
6 Why you think it's useful for Britain to hold on to some kind of nuclear deterrent in a pragmatic way?  
**Mike Clark**  
12 We can contribute to multilateral disarmament [...] our 200 odd warheads will become part of the negotiation.  
**Kenan Malik**  
10 So you're suggesting that Britain has greater influence on the world's stage because it possesses those weapons?  
**Mike Clark**  
13 That you're talking about is that there are only a few nuclear powers at the moment and the five powers in the P5, in the Permanent Five in the UN have the ability through their collective will to create a much more effective arms control regime.  
**Clifford Longley**  
17 Isn't that really all about national pride and self esteem? That's not moral is it? 20 Are not the major security threats facing this country regard states ruled by megamilitarism or international terrorism organisations that are not beholden to any of the logic that could sustain the deterrents theory?  
**Mike Clark**  
20 Yes, absolutely right. 24 If Al Qaeda got hold of nuclear weapons the thing that they would like most will be a nuclear exchange. 25 In that respect the world is a very dangerous place. 23 It's not gone beyond the tipping point it seems to me because these are relatively esoteric threats.  
**Clifford Longley**  
21 So our possession of them makes it more dangerous therefore?  
**Mike Clark**  
22 Our possession of them makes the world more of a hair trigger mechanism because it means there are more nuclear possessors but 12 we're able to trade in our nuclear capability to a bargaining chip in favour of a regime of arms control, when we're getting somewhere.

**Clifford Longley**  
14 So then there is a real moral case for keeping these weapons? 16 The justification is rooted in the Cold War. 18 The Cold War is no longer there. 18 Deterrents theory was founded upon the assumption you've got two equal powers.  
**Mike Clark**  
18 The safest way to go down to a very low number or even zero is in a graduated controlled way.  
**Michael Burke**  
Our last witness is Bruce Kent who of course is now the Honoured Vice President of CND and was associated with CND all those years.  
**Claire Fox**  
5 You struck me as (having) a cheap moral pose around nuclear weapons. An awful lot of the liberal left CND as I knew 19 actually supported quite a bit of wars but then 17 they could kind of get very high and mighty about nuclear weapons.  
**Clifford Longley**  
4 Well CND [...] never meant that you couldn't support a war which you thought was legitimate.  
**Claire Fox**  
16 Many of the people in CND were entirely pro-imperialist, pro-militarist, pro-war.  
**Bruce Kent**  
24 To say its not a pacifist organisation doesn't mean its pro-war, imperialist and all the rest. 14 It wasn't our issue particularly.  
**Claire Fox**  
22 There was an awful lot of scaremongering about the particular horrors that nuclear weaponry would bring [...]. 23 the consequences of that scaremongering was precisely what allowed us to go into a war in Iraq.  
**Bruce Kent**  
31 I think the scaremongers were utterly justified. 29 Do you know the name of Colonel Petrov? The man who actually saved the world in 1983 by not telling Moscow that the Russians were under attack and had to do it or they would've fired? 30 The risk of accident and miscalculation has been massive ever 50 years and we've been very, very lucky.  
**Claire Fox**  
13 So it really is quite a kind of pragmatic argument then?  
**Bruce Kent**  
14 These weapons are indiscriminate in their use [...] that is the basic moral argument.  
**Claire Fox**  
12 But the carpet bombing of Dresden, just as an example, I mean 3 it's not the type of weapon is it?  
**Bruce Kent**  
10 A ten tonne TNT bomb can be used with some sort of discrimination. A nuclear weapon cannot and that's why 2 it's a different moral issue.

**Melanie Phillips**  
10 I think that this country should give up its nuclear weapons yes?  
**Bruce Kent**  
7 In comparison with other nuclear powers, certainly.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
8 Why's it different with America, between America and us?  
**Bruce Kent**  
21 Because politically it's impossible for them to ever consider such a thing.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
10 Why?  
**Bruce Kent**  
28 Because their population would never agree to anything like it.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
Would you?  
**Bruce Kent**  
28 Because the opinion has very much changed about security in this country. I think public opinion is on the move.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
Aren't you sheltering behind a political argument? 19 Do you think we should remain in NATO?  
**Bruce Kent**  
19 Not while NATO has first used policies of nuclear weaponry.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
27 We, as a country, shelter to a large extent under the nuclear umbrella.  
**Bruce Kent**  
34 I think we sit under a nuclear lightning conductor.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
19 If Hitler had had a nuclear weapon, if he had basically come to us and said "I'll allow you to take over 'old nuke you'", in those circumstances would we have been entitled to use it?  
**Bruce Kent**  
24 I would not incinerate Hamburg or Berlin in order to preserve my life.  
**Melanie Phillips**  
28 So you would rather have this country incinerated and occupied by a fascist power than incinerate anyone else who was attacking you? It's immoral to defend your own country, to prevent loss of life, to defend democracy.  
**Bruce Kent**  
You're talking defence as if this was defence. 32 I call it mass, mutual suicide.  
33 There are reasons of defence and some means are moral and some means immoral. 8 The moral point is that to threaten and to use nuclear weapons on the centres of population is absolutely immoral.

**Melanie Phillips, social commentator on the Daily Mail**  
There is a moral case for using nuclear weapons  
If a nuclear power is threatening Britain, there would be a moral case for using nuclear weapons

**Catholic writer Clifford Longley**  
Britain should not keep its nuclear weapons  
The Cold War has ended and none of the original justifications any longer mean we can keep nuclear weapons

**Claire Fox from the Institute of Ideas**  
There is no moral case for using nuclear weapons  
The use of nuclear weapons by the US was immoral

**Kenan Malik, neurobiologist who works on the Frontiers of Science, Behaviour and Politics**  
There is no moral case for using nuclear weapons  
The mass indiscriminate killing of civilians is morally indefensible

Britain should not keep its nuclear weapons  
The role of Trident is to project Britain as a global power; such delusions of grandeur can and have been hugely damaging for people across the world

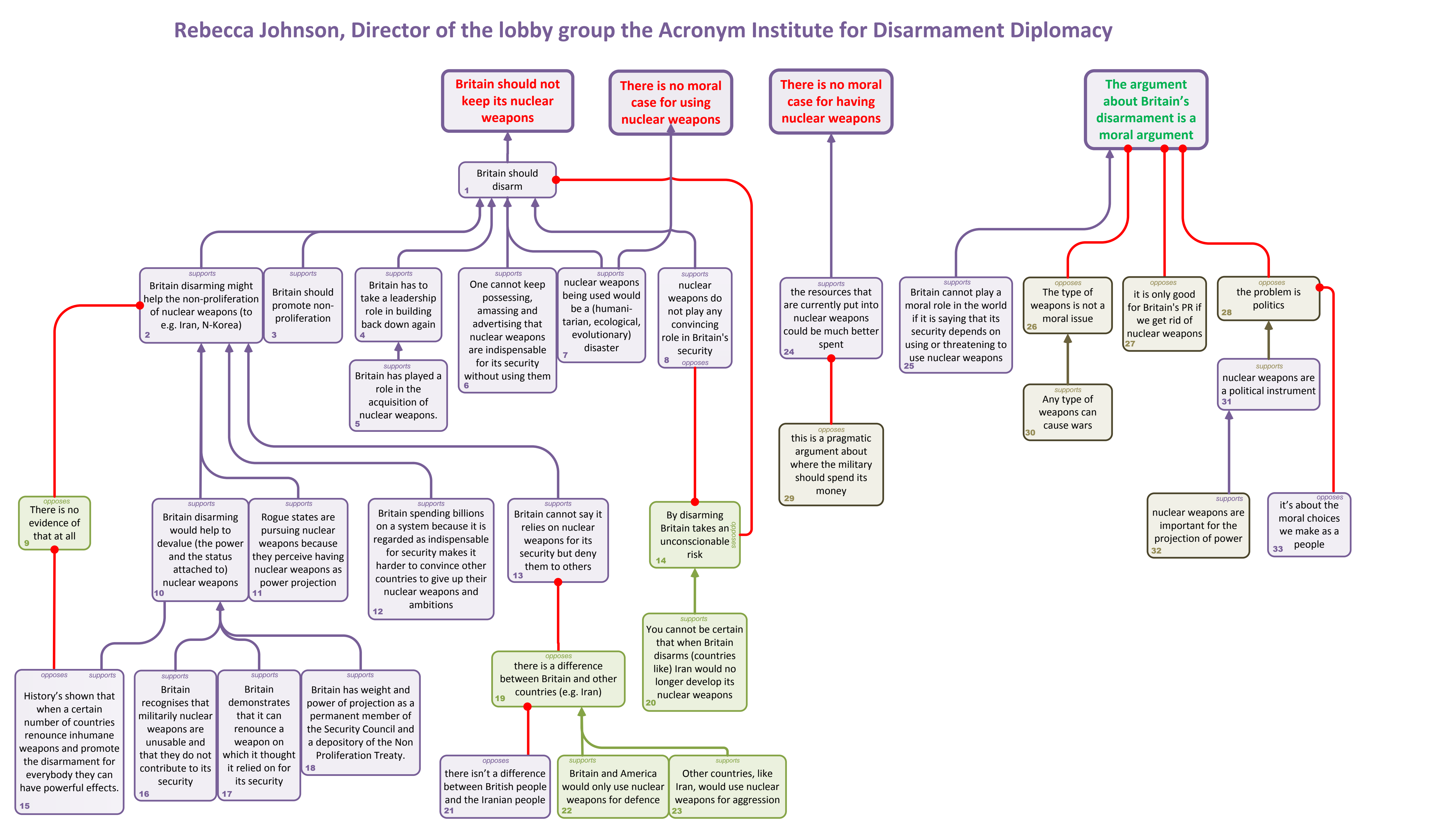
The argument about Britain's disarmament is not a moral argument  
In the abstract there is no distinction difference between conventional and nuclear weapons

Main questions this programme  
Should Britain keep its nuclear weapons?

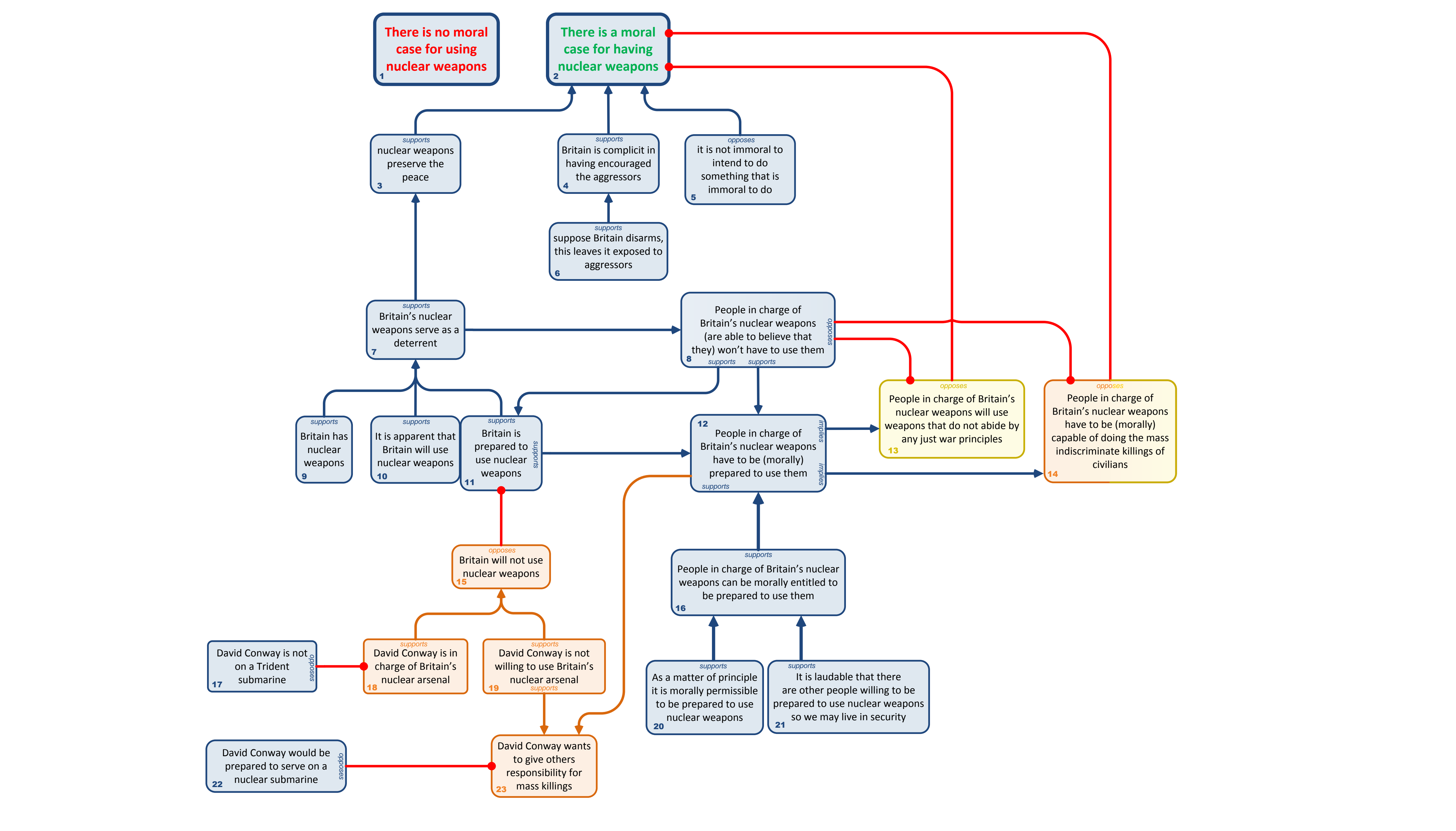
Is the question whether Britain should keep its nuclear weapons a moral issue?

Is there a moral case for having nuclear weapons?

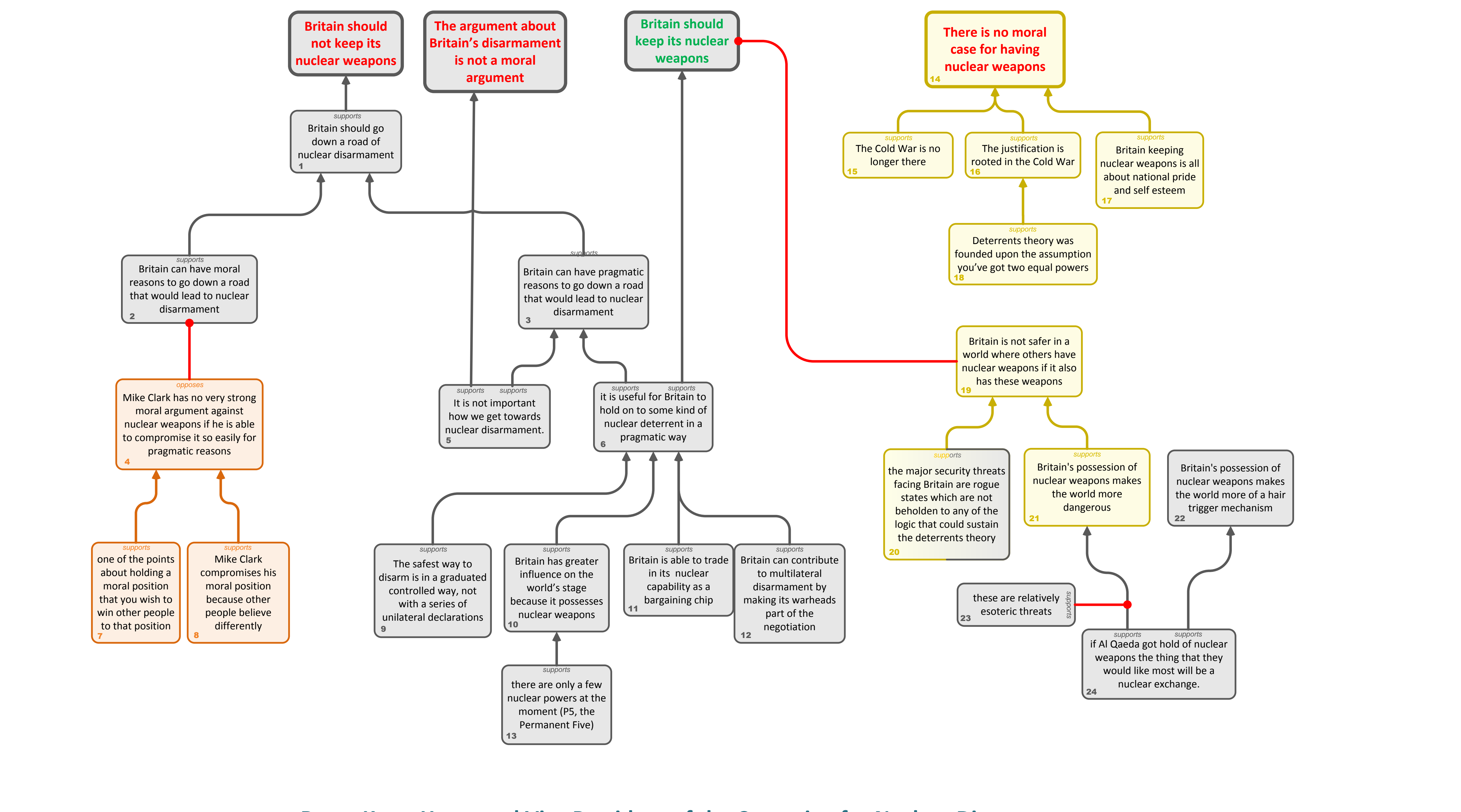
Is there a moral case for using nuclear weapons?



David Conway, Senior Research Fellow at the think tank Civitas



Mike Clark, director of the Royal United Services Institute



Bruce Kent, Honoured Vice President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

