

Could Johnson take the initiative and solve the Irish b...

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Boris Johnson has been like a wrecking ball in the last week. His premiership is in tatters. His party is torn asunder. His majority has long gone. It looks as if his days are numbered. And still he has to get a deal if he is to avoid breaking the law, as he has long said he will do.

Bizarrely the complete mess he has made of things so far gives him that chance. Without any hope of a majority the DUP have no control over Johnson any more: their power base was entirely dependent upon providing the government with the votes it needs. Their votes now count for nothing when Johnson is so far from a majority any more.

But, that means Johnson could suggest the obvious solution, long favoured by the EU, to the Irish backstop question. That is to have a border down the Irish Sea. I know it divides Northern Ireland from the UK. But it is already. And not just physically. It has a separate legal system. And the differences are not just semantic: in some cases they have been fundamental, as the abortion issue proved. There are ample other examples.

Such a move will, of course, inflame the DUP. I am not unaware of the risks: they are real. But then, so too is the risk of an Irish border real, and maybe more so. There is no non-risky solution here. There is nothing about Brexit, anywhere, that does not require unnecessary and inappropriate risk to be taken. But of all the risks that it involves this one seems one of the more logical to take: that's the best that can be said for it.

It respects the Good Friday Agreement.

It reflects economic reality.

It reflects geographic reality.

It even reflects political reality if only Stormont was to get its act together.

I stress: it's far from optimal. But only revoking Article 50 delivers optimality.

But in a situation where no outcome is good Johnson could opt for a possible solution today. And if he did rather bizarrely I suspect he could get an EU deal done and through parliament well before the end of October.

That's not what I want, but I think it has to be noted as an option. And given that the Tories are no longer Conservative, why presume that they are Unionist either?

I suspect nothing like this will happen. But it has to be noted as existing as an agenda item.