Irish Reunification and Ulster

This short piece is a study that must be substantially extended by reference to the studies of others, both expert and those with experience on the ground, which is a qualification for expertise anyway. Despite my deep ignorance of the history, social conflict and culture of Northern Ireland, I feel I need to articulate a proposal.

I am interested in negotiations with social groups with different norms. Broadly, responses between social systems typically tend towards isolation, adaptation or violence to protect the norms of a group.

As is well known, the demographic situation in the North of Ireland is under change. Additionally, the imminent arrival of hard Brexit will introduce a partition between the integrated economic entity of Ireland. The resulting economic, and therefore social, chaos will result in efforts to speed up unification, as might be desired on grounds of common sense. Simultaneously Ulster Unionists, always determined to maintain their cultural norms and identity, will feel even more the necessity to resort to force to maintain their current position.

In a certain sense, the culture of Northern Ireland is integrated, sometimes in the knowledge of its differences. In the Republic, with a more European culture, these differences are not always as well known. A fully integrated Republic of Ireland would threaten the cultural norms of the Unionists as well as asserting as a huge majority Nationalist pre-eminence. We might say that under these conditions the hysteria against this by some Unionists would result in violent opposition.

It is observed that leaders of the Nationalist community in the North, and more widely, consider they have made substantial efforts to obtain agreement with Unionists, often with nil result.

We are confronted with the fact that as humans, under a certain set of circumstances, some of us are amenable to reason. For others, even when that is not the case, some modification can be brought about by factors within the environment either by the experience of pleasure or pain. We may acknowledge that some behaviour is in-built. It cannot be changed by the environment. For social groups I am not aware of any direct reason why these characteristics should be transferred to them. We may conclude by repeated and consistent observation that they do.

I state my behaviour is ethical. This must be investigated – it is dangerous to act on information in a political context where motives are proclaimed and accepted without due investigation, where there is substantial evidence that behaviour or intentions are directly to the contrary.

All protocols of communication involve the regulation and transmission of human behaviours. Including my writing here, this applies to
    (1) Collective delusional behaviour which is evidence-free.
    (2) Uncontrolled and dangerous violent behaviour.
Any rational consideration of human behaviour must include these universal characteristics. I am a human.

On understanding our aims, and possibly those of others, it may be possible to devise a strategy which is ethical towards all parties, where one or the other is cognitively unable to negotiate. This may arise from in-built behaviour of a social group which we have strong and persistent evidence cannot be changed, and one party, even as a protagonist, can devise a strategy that

will result in eventual reluctant compliance. If well-formulated, this will allow the opposing group sufficient space to maintain its norms. I believe space should allowed so that these are maximised, without at the same time allowing substantial overlap of the norms of one group over the other, where pain and discomfort would result. If evidence is there that social groups cannot involve in meaningful negotiation, say for the reasons discussed, if one party has command of some type of political or power structure where a status is imposed, it may be possible to impose this in a way that does not introduce too much discomfort in the opposing group.

I believe this situation pertains in Northern Ireland. A subtext is that I support human rights, and as a consequence it might be thought that I support what I think would be called one group there where I believe its rights have not been given due consideration. It is occasionally stated that an arbitrator can successfully introduce an agreed accommodation without necessarily being neutral. Whereas we might think we are not necessarily in this scenario, and a situation of violence could return the precise contours of which I am unable to predict, it is desirable for me to indicate my support for a proposal which would arise naturally in the long term for demographic reasons, and might well be accelerated by other events.

The proposal is that on unification the autonomy of the North is immediately granted. This is implemented in various countries in Europe. It would still be the case that a large number of Unionists would object even to this. If a separate part of the North were then allocated to those Unionists in total opposition to integration with the Republic, which should have sensible boundaries, it could be granted independence. Further, the two remaining communities in the North, comprising an autonomous entity which it might be thought would have a greater desire to engage in mutual adaptation between its parts, would more readily be able to negotiate with one another.

An additional idea has occurred to me that perhaps may not have occurred anywhere else. There is the desire of a part of the Nationalist community to become directly a part of the Republic. Simultaneously, the partitioning of the North to grant a new state complete independence would split the Unionist community so that overall an autonomous North would consist of a majority Nationalist community, and a minority remaining Unionist one, and given that imbalance the remaining Unionists might feel that this reversal of roles might lead to implicit persecution. It seems desirable that the option could be discussed that a portion of the North with a strong desire for complete integration should be allocated where this occurs, so that the effect is that in the autonomous part the Nationalist and Unionist components had a comparable population, and therefore from the Unionist, and also the Nationalist parts, equal access to the power structure, and therefore equal ability to maintain their cultural integrity.

It may additionally be the case, should a hard Brexit occur, that the Ulster part would be a successor state of the Irish Republic. This would presumably mean that the Brexit negotiations formulated by the government in London would not automatically apply. As a scenario, an offer could be made to the new state, not immediately to belong to the UK, but of course to allow this to happen as one would expect, by negotiation between this state and the UK regime. This at least would allow a temporary respite from the economic chaos I think will be induced by a hard Brexit in the UK. I believe a lot of the negotiation on this issue by the government in London is incompetent. This would at least allow the Ulster state additional time to consider its options in this matter, which would be under its direct control.