Canada should be taking more direct action against China in-stead of “turning the other cheek” and touting its record of getting other countries to advocate on its behalf with the superpower as the diplomatic row escalates, say former diplomats and experts.

Charles Burton, former counsellor at the Canadian embassy in Beijing, said he believes Canada could do more to counter China’s rising influence in the region. “There’s an argument that’s been made by the Chinese that we shouldn’t be interfering in the internal matters of other countries, implying that we are,” Burton said in an interview with The Hill Times. “In my opinion, that is an argument we have to make a lot more of, much more than we have been.”

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

Canada’s next prime minister could appoint at least 24 new Senators, giving the country’s future leader the power to solidify the new approach to appointing Senators ushered in by the Liberals, or revert back to the old patronage system.

Eight Senators are expected to retire before Parliament resumes after the election: Raynell Andreychuk, Jacques Demers, Paul McIntyre, Richard Neufeld, Nicole Eaton, Joseph Day, Serge Joyal, and David Tkachuk. A total of 24 are expected to retire by 2023, leaving the next prime minister—if they secure a four-year majority mandate—to either entrench or roll back the current Senator appointment system.

The numbers mean the next Parliament could be a turning point for Senate reform, says Sen. Tony Dean, but “there’s no scenario where it’s a slam dunk for anybody.”

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No sign Canada ‘making inroads’ with China, strategy not working as Trudeau claims, say former diplomats

Canada ‘more or less completely passive’ on China file, according to former Canadian diplomat to Beijing Charles Burton.

Continued from page 1 in Beijing, said he’s “very concerned” by Canada’s approach, which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) claimed last week “is working.”

“I haven’t seen any evidence that any of our allies have paid more than lip service to this,” Mr. Burton, though he conceded getting such public support from other nations “is better than doing nothing at all.”

China’s escalating trade sanctions on Canada and the reported deterioration of conditions for Canadian detainees in China don’t support Mr. Trudeau’s claim that the bilateral relations are not working, Mr. Robertson, said former diplomats Colin Robertson and Sarah Goldfeder, who noted the opposite might be true.

“I do think we’re failing,” said Mr. Robertson, while Ms. Goldfeder said, “I don’t see anything rolled back.”

Having the relationship between Canada and China be conducted by proxies, she added “is not ideal for either country,” which both no longer have ambassadors in place.

Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were both detained in December 2018 soon after Canadian officials arrested Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou, who is facing extradition to the United States. The Globe and Mail reported July 2 that Mr. Kovrig’s reading glasses were taken away, and Mr. Robertson said those worsening conditions suggest China’s “continuing to turn up the dial.”

“There’s no sign they’re relenting,” he said, and no sign Canada is “making any inroads”.

With Canada “turning the other cheek,” China keeps “turning up the screws”- canola, then pork, then beef. What will be next?“said Mr. Robertson, who said Canada should “take a hard look” at the more than 120,000 Chinese students studying in Canada.

“If they’re sons and daughters of the elite, well maybe they don’t get their visa denied. We have 30,000 students studying in Canada,” said Mr. Robertson.

There’s a school of thought that says stronger action will lead to greater retaliation from China, but Mr. Burton said he believes Canada will “regain some respect if we cease to be more or less completely passive.”

Canada has halted all canola purchases from Canada since March. The country is China’s biggest customer, with the value of exports exceeding $4-billion last year, according to the Canola Council of Canada. In the months since, China also increased its food safety inspections on pork and beef imports from Canada, last week blocking a third Chinese company after it said it found traces of a banned pesticide.

It appears that Mr. Trudeau was “taking on faith” that U.S. President Donald Trump raised the issue of detained Canadians with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Japan, said Mr. Robertson, since it hasn’t been confirmed by U.S. State Department or White House statements of that bilateral discussion in Osaka.

After Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang denounced Canada as “naive” to think getting allies to apply public pressure would influence the bilateral relations, Mr. Trudeau said he was “confident” the conversation happened. Unidentified government sources have told other media outlets that Canadian officials received confirmation from their U.S. counterparts that Mr. Trump had those conversations with the Chinese leader.

The strategy is working in the sense “the Chinese government’s attention is now focused on the Chinese leader,” according to Mr. Robertson, while Ms. Goldfeder said, “I don’t see anything rolled back.”

Having other countries carry our message is “a significant” but separate from how it actually affects Canada’s relations with China, said Ms. Goldfeder, though she agreed the approach “may be a more of a long game play.”

Scheer’s suggestions ‘highly desirable and rather obvious,’ says Burton

With an election in October, Mr. Trudeau is already facing attacks from Conservative Party Leader Andrew Scheer (Regina-Qu’Appelle, Sask.) that Canada is being “bullied” by China.

“The government is vulnerable there,” said Mr. Robertson, while Mr. Burton said foreign policy hasn’t been a major issue for voters in past elections, the last few months have proven Canada’s approach with China is “in need of some revisions.”

On July 5, Mr. Scheer urged more action, saying the government must “stand up” to China. That includes withdrawing Canada from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, launching a complaint at the World Trade Organization, increasing inspections on all Chinese imports, and examining potential retaliatory tariffs on Chinese imports.

Those sanctions are “highly desirable and rather obvious,” said Mr. Burton, though he doesn’t want to see relations become “a partisan political football.”

Brian Iemes, vice-president of public affairs with the Canola Council of Canada (CCC), said the group is “working closely” with the government on a strategy for the sector, but he can’t get into specifics.

He said more needs to be done during this time of “unprecedented uncertainty” for the industry. Asked if the CCC supports the Conservative recommendations, he said the group wants to see Canada “use all the tools available and the suggestions by Mr. Scheer are helpful for Canadians to think about what’s required to have a strong relationship with China.”

Mr. McCuiga-Johnston said Canada should do more, but must be “extremely careful” it doesn’t “give China a pretext for taking further disproportionate action.”

While she’s supportive of some of the measures Mr. Scheer proposed, she said she fears a negative outcome if he forms government and his rhetoric holds.

“I’m very concerned that having a party in power, who is seen, on the face of it, to be rigidly anti-China, would mean that the Canadians would not be released and other actions that China’s taken would not be lifted,” she said.

Sen. Harder’s China visit suggests ongoing push to meet with officials

Some saw last week’s visit to China by Senator Peter Harder, the federal Liberal government’s representative in the Senate, as a positive development.

Sen. Harder (Ottawa, Ont.) was president of the Canada China Business Council from 2008 to 2016, the year Mr. Trudeau appointed him to the Upper Chamber.

The former deputy minister of foreign affairs has relationships in China that “make it harder for them to turn him away,” noted Ms. Goldfeder, and shows the extent this government is going to try to get meetings with the Chinese.

And as a sitting Senator “there’s more weight to what he’s doing” in the country, than the prestige even former prime ministers could offer.

Sen. Harder “conducted some govern- ment business during his trip,” doing a round table discussion at the Canadian embassy, taking part in Canada Day celebration, and having meetings at the Center for China and Globalization, she said.

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