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Central America - New Role for Canada

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The Minister of External Relations says Canadian soldiers could be sent to Central America if negotiations can bring about a general ceasefire in the region. Mr. Pepin was speaking in New York where he has been meeting with foreign ministers from Latin America. The Canadian force would be used to monitor border areas and the movement of weapons in the region.

T. Row The new Canadian position is an attempt to bolster the role of the Contadora group of nations, made up of Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia and Panama. It is the result of informal approaches by members of the group. Mr. Pepin says one foreign minister had already enquired whether Canada would be willing to send an observer force to the region. So far there has been no official request but Canada has signalled its interest in participating. Mr. Pepin added that once there is a lessening of conflict in the region, Canada also will be called upon to increase its economic aid.

Mr. Pepin That's the price you pay for having been involved all along. You cannot expect to be just in the cheering section. At one point you are asked to become a player.

T. Row The Minister says that if Canada is asked to be a player, its role will be modest. He says it would involve limited personnel, some communications equipment and transport vehicles. Nevertheless, the fact that the Government is prepared to consider such a role marks a significant shift in the Central American policy. No longer is Canada limiting itself to encouraging the efforts of the Contadora group. Instead it is expressing interest in playing a more active role in the region. For CBC News this is Trevor Row at the U.N. in New York.