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CENTRAL AMERICA/BROKAW: President Reagan's spirited defense of his U.S. AID 2 Central American policies today is bound to bring a reaction from congressional critics, most of whom are home now on Easter recess. John Chancellor has been reviewing the administration's actions in Central America, and in his commentary tonight, he compares them with an earlier American experience in that part of the world. John?

CHANCELLOR: It took the United States years to live down the diplomatic disaster of the Bay of Pigs, a military catastrophe which began, incidentally, 23 years ago today. And it will take years for the country to live down its mistakes this spring in Central America. At the center of all the fuss is Nicaragua, which has been breaking international law by supporting the rebellion in El Salvador. There is evidence of this, a case to be made. Did the United States take its case against Nicaragua to the United Nations Security Council as it is required to do under the UN Charter? No, Nicaragua went to the Security Council to complain about American aggression. France voted with Nicaragua. Britain abstained. The United States was forced into a Soviet-style veto. Did the United States or El Salvador go to the Organization of American States to complain about Nicaragua? No, neither country went to the OAS. Did the United States go to the World Court with its case against Nicaragua as it had when Iran seized American hostages? No, Nicaragua went to the World Court with a complaint about American aggression, and the United States lost the moral high ground by saying it would ignore the court. Did the administration level with the U.S. Senate as it is legally required to do? No, the CIA's attitude toward the Senate Intelligence Committee was, 'We'll give you the right answer only if you ask the right question.' The reason for all this may have been summed up by one official who said the legalistic approach was inadequate to deal with the realities of Communist aggression. No, the reality is that the administration has bungled the whole policy, embarrassed the country in the eyes of the world and frightened the American people. It's the 1984 equivalent of the Bay of Pigs.