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SUBJECT Aid to Nicaragua

BOB SCHIEFFER: It may sound like a contradiction in terms, but President Reagan made a public appeal today for more secret aid to the rebels in Nicaragua. The appeal came in the President's weekly radio address.

We have a report from Jacqueline Adams.

JACQUELINE ADAMS: From his California ranch, President Reagan launched a major lobbying effort for continued covert assistance to Nicaraguan rebels. Recalling France's aid to American Revolutionaries in the 1770s, Mr. Reagan said that help for the Contras is legal and totally consistent with our history.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: How can we refuse them assistance when we know that ultimately their fight is our fight? Congress must understand that the American people support the struggle for democracy in Central America.

ADAMS: White House sources say there's no way American troops will be sent to Nicaragua, but they're quite blunt about wanting to change what they see as Nicaragua's Marxist-Leninist regime into a fully democratic government.

The U.S. cannot legally foment the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government. But after considering options for military and humanitarian aid, the President decided to continue to finesse the point, asking Congress for \$14 million in not-so-secret secret aid for Nicaraguan rebels.

Some members of Congress doubt that Mr. Reagan's lobbying will change many votes.

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SENATOR DAVID DURENBERGER: There are a lot of us who strongly would support a sensible American commitment to democratic revolution in Nicaragua who just will not support it with the CIA is supposed to run a covert action.

ADAMS: For years the Administration argued that covert aid was needed to stop the flow of arms from Nicaragua to its neighbors. Now the White House is emphasizing that military pressure is needed to force the Sandinistas to negotiate with the Contras.

Regardless of the argument, White House officials admit there's a tough fight ahead.