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THE FOCUS OF THE NEW DEBATE, CIA HAS HISTORY OF CONTROVERSY
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The CIA, back in the political spotlight because of a campaign remark by President Reagan, has endured numerous congressional probes, a massive staff reorganization, and public criticism in the 1970s.

Reagan suggested during a campaign stop in Ohio on Wednesday that the nation's primary intelligence gathering agency had been nearly destroyed by his predecessor, Jimmy Carter.

The comment unleashed a debate between Reagan and Carter over what happened at the agency during the last decade.

Carter, speaking from Atlanta, angrily retorted that any allegations linking the Beirut bombing to his administration's treatment of the CIA were insulting.

Congress started looking into CIA activities in the early 1970s, several years before Carter was elected in 1976.

A total of eight House and Senate intelligence committees launched investigations in the aftermath of allegations of wrongdoing by the CIA, which was founded in 1947.

By 1975, congressional investigators determined the agency had spied on American activists opposed to the Vietnam war, initiated plots to kill leaders in Cuba and the Congo, and advocated the overthrow of a democratically elected government in Chile.

Congress also passed the so-called Hughes-Ryan amendment in 1974, requiring the president to inform eight congressional committees of any decision to order the CIA to engage in covert activity abroad.

That measure, which Carter complained inhibited the CIA, was repealed in 1980. It was replaced by a requirement that the president tell the House and Senate intelligence committees in a timely fashion of any plans for covert action.

About a year after taking office, Carter's CIA director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, began a staff reorganization that resulted in the dismissal of more than 400 officers in the clandestine operations department. The unit is responsible for secretly collecting foreign intelligence.

Turner's action, which he said was necessary because the agency had become "top-heavy," seriously damaged morale at the agency and prompted many middle-level CIA employees to leave the agency for jobs in private industry.

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