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WAVERLY, IOWA

HERSH DECRIES AMERICAN MILITARY POLICY

Most of the United States' problems stem from the fact Americans are awed by the power and prestige of their president, a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist said Wednesday.

"We have given the president the right to use troops without consultation and we have given the president the right to lie to us about it," Seymour Hersh told an audience at Wartburg College.

"Somehow we have to reduce that awe and begin treating the president as we would treat anyone else."

Hersh, who won a Pulitzer in 1979 for his coverage of the My Lai massacre, said there is little the news media can do to combat the problem. He said it is a mistake to treat Watergate as a victory for the news media because the disclosure came after the election.

"If the press had been effective, there might have been public debate before the election, and history might have been changed," he said. "If the president lies to the press there is not much we can do. The presidency is too powerful.

"There has been an erosion of old fashioned beliefs in this country. We need more honesty, straight talking and morality at the top as well as in the family."

He said America's policy during the past several years "has been to fight immorality with immorality, and I can't think of a policy that could get us into more trouble."

Hersh said Americans "are going to have to bite some bullets" to end the arms race between the United States and Russia.

"We have to do something dramatic to end this empasse," he said, suggesting the United States tell the Soviets it will take 300 of its 1,054 land-based missiles out of their silos.

"We would tell them we would then wait three years and see what they did," he said. "If the Soviets reduce their arms, we would leave them out and maybe take some more out. If not, we would put them back in.

"What's so outlandish about that? Somebody is going to have to do something."

Hersch said the stories that have won him awards and international fame -- the My Lai massacre, CIA domestic spying, the CIA in Chile, CIA involvement in arms sales to Lybia, the secret B-52 bombing of Cambodia - were uncovered for him by people with personal integrity.

In working on those stories, Hersh said, he was continually amazed at the low priority American leaders put on human values.

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