

National Security Mom: Why "Going Soft" Will Make America Strong

Gina M. Bennett

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Being a good parent is like being a good counterterrorism agent, and vice versa.

That's an intriguing concept, and one explored by Gina M. Bennett in her new book, *National Security Mom*. She equates her twenty years of work as a Senior Counterterrorism Analyst in the U.S. intelligence community to her years of parenting, and illustrates why the two have much in common. This is not as glib as it may sound; Bennett puts forth persuasive arguments as to why common and time-tested parenting concepts have value within the counterterrorism community.

Stylistically the book is divided into three sections. The first looks at a variety of truisms often used in life ("An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"; "Actions speak louder than words") and applies them to the world of national security. The second section reviews the lessons parents often teach children ("Tell the truth"; "Choose your friends wisely") and why those pieces of advice aren't just good for the elementary school set. The final section uses famous quotes (Gandhi's "We must be the change we wish to see") to illustrate how individual and familial actions affect the world around us, whether on a local, regional, or national level.

Bennett spent several years with the Counterterrorist Center and the Central Intelligence Agency. She's also a mother of five, so she comes to the topic with extensive experience in the parenting arena. Her parenting views are of a "firm but kind" bent; sometimes parents have to make hard choices, and the important thing is either to stick with those choices, or to understand when they're wrong and explain why a change of course is necessary. Good parents don't give in to whining or bullying children, but instead explain clearly the values they want their children to learn. That is the primary lesson Bennett promotes for approaching the ominous world of terrorism.

While parenting is a major part of the book's theme, it is more likely to be of interest to readers looking for current events, national security, and foreign policy debates. It's not a politically dense book, but a highly approachable read, with anecdotes from Bennett's personal work and parenting experiences highlighting her recommendations.

Perhaps counterterrorism professionals should work with parenting experts; Bennett's book makes it clear that's not an approach to be mocked.

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