

"Our nation needs a new grand strategy and this is it. Mykleby, Doherty, and Makower have developed a pragmatic, actionable, long-term strategy that taps into what is best about America."

—ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN, USN (RET.), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2007–11

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RESTORING AMERICA'S  
PROSPERITY,  
SECURITY, AND  
SUSTAINABILITY  
IN THE 21ST CENTURY



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## PROLOGUE

# HOW WE GOT HERE

**THIS BOOK BEGINS IN THE PENTAGON. IN JULY 2009, TWO UNITED** States military officers, a Marine colonel and a Navy captain, were sequestered in Room 2E928, on the second floor of the building’s E-ring, the outermost of five concentric corridors, where the highest-profile work is done. There, just a few months into President Barack Obama’s first term, Colonel Mark “Puck” Mykleby and Captain Wayne Porter were given an assignment by Admiral Mike Mullen: to create a grand strategy for America.

Not a military strategy. We already had one of those—several, in fact. Mullen was seeking a strategy for the next chapter of America’s future.

At the time, Mullen was the seventeenth Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest-ranking officer in the United States Armed Forces, nominated to the post in 2007 by President George W. Bush. He was no stranger to Washington or the Pentagon: in his previous role as Chief of Naval Operations, he already was a member of the Joint Chiefs. It was the culmination of a distinguished 40-year career, which also included assignments as Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe; Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples; and Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

As chairman, Mullen found himself frustrated. “I caught the Bush administration in the last 15 months, and they were beat to death,” he recalled when we spoke with him in 2015. “Iraq hadn’t gone well, and I

wanted to know what Obama was going to do when he came in. What's the strategic approach?"

Up to that point, there was no strategy—at least, none that related to the twenty-first-century world Mullen and his troops were facing. America's Cold War strategic architecture remained largely intact, designed for a world that no longer existed. Our once-prosperous economic engine, built in the 1940s and '50s, had recently collapsed from too much debt—and the only way to keep the machine going was to feed it even more debt. Our foreign policy apparatus, devised to contain the tyranny of Soviet authoritarianism, was struggling just to preserve and defend the status quo in the face of far different challenges. By the summer of 2009, it was clear that the Cold War-era global institutions and capabilities, designed to control and coerce through military force and technology, were ill-suited to the current era. Our national security mind-set was reactive, able to manage crises as they arose but with no ability to envision, much less define, a new strategic era.

This was no idle concern. Our threat-centric worldview had very real consequences for the United States. We had spent the first decade of the twenty-first century focused on al-Qaeda, Iraq, and Afghanistan, running up trillions of dollars of debt fighting wars with little to show for it. Meanwhile, the rest of the world focused on the economic opportunity embedded in the resurgence of Asia, as well as the emerging threats from climate change and the opportunities for new technologies to help solve it. By early 2009, when Admiral Mullen met Barack Obama, his new commander in chief, America's post-9/11 worldview inspired little, if any, enthusiasm beyond our shores.

America was learning, sometimes painfully, that global dominance was not a sustainable strategy. Today's world is complex and dynamic, with constant change and uncertainty. Mullen wanted Porter and Mykleby to offer up a new, more relevant narrative of where America stood in the world and where it wanted to go—in effect, what the million and a half or so men and women of America's armed forces were fighting for.

"I had this constant need for a strategy and an inability to get interest from anybody—quite frankly, right up through the White House," Mullen recounted. "I wanted to know how I fit in. I had significant leadership responsibilities and I needed to know where to go. I needed something for the country."

He added, after a momentary pause, “Now, those are not words that come out of the Chairman of Joint Chief of Staff’s mouth because that’s what the president is supposed to do.” But Mullen wasn’t getting what he needed from the White House or anyone else.

He charged Colonel Mykleby and Captain Porter with the mission of creating a vision of the future. “First of all,” he told them, “it’s got to be different. And second, it’s a lot bigger than just the military.”

Those, in effect, were their marching orders.

### FROM NARRATIVE TO STRATEGY

Mykleby and Porter set out to create the vision they believed Mullen was looking for. A month later, in August 2009, they emerged with a document titled *A National Strategic Narrative*. It outlined an approach “to achieve sustainable prosperity and security . . . through the application of credible influence and strength, the pursuit of fair competition, acknowledgment of interdependencies and converging interests, and adaptation to complex, dynamic systems—all bounded by our national values.”

The *National Strategic Narrative* was intended to explain—both to the American people and to others around the world—the direction our nation would take in the twenty-first century. Porter and Mykleby felt that Americans were searching for a consistent, enduring path that not only addressed their interests of prosperity and security but also preserved and propagated their values and national purpose as delineated in the Preamble of our Constitution. They felt that America needed a clear, coherent, and compelling national design to carry us through the complexities we face today in order to lead us toward a better tomorrow.

Substantively, the *National Strategic Narrative* argued for a grand strategy that focuses foreign and domestic policies toward the common goal of building our national strength and credible influence. And in doing so, that strategy would allow us to adapt, compete, grow, and evolve in a manner commensurate with our values and sustain us over time.

In fact, the document cited sustainability as our number-one national strategic imperative for the twenty-first century.

Why should sustainability serve as the centerpiece of a new American grand strategy? The reason lies in its literal scientific definition. Sustainability describes the state in which biological systems are able to

“remain diverse and productive over time.” Porter and Mykleby believed this definition fit nicely into America’s purpose: diversity fosters resilience, and productivity leads to growth—resilience and growth being two critical aspects of America’s enduring national interests of security and prosperity. Equally important, “over time” reminds us that we must think and act in generational terms, not just in the here and now.

Porter and Mykleby saw the organizing logic of sustainability as key to rebuilding strength at home and informing our investments in education, training, the environment, energy, and America’s crumbling infrastructure. By building this strength, the United States could once again lead by example and, through restored credibility and influence, shift global trend lines toward a more opportunities-based and positive future. In the simplest terms, by walking the talk here in America, our smart growth at home could become our smart power abroad. To support the transition to sustainability, the report called for a National Prosperity and Security Act, the modern-day equivalent of the National Security Act of 1947, which led to a major restructuring of the federal government’s military and intelligence agencies following World War II.

Mykleby and Porter delivered their *Narrative* to Mullen in August 2009. Mullen liked what he saw but also recognized the political sensitivities of releasing the document, given what it said and that it was coming from the office of the military’s most senior officer. As a result, Porter and Mykleby began seeking feedback from individuals within the executive branch and among Washington’s many think tanks. Early on, they met Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter, then Director of Policy Planning at the State Department. Slaughter rapidly became a key advocate for Porter and Mykleby and their *Narrative*, opening doors on their behalf within the Washington establishment.

Even though the *Narrative* reached the top levels of the Departments of State and Defense and the National Security Council, it was only a narrative, not a strategy, and did not lay out a prescriptive course of action. This was mostly because Porter and Mykleby, as uniformed military officers, could not and would not cross the established line of their professional responsibilities and prescribe domestic policy, which would have to be at the heart of any new grand strategy. That is the realm of civilian leadership.

As a result, even with Slaughter’s help, the *National Strategic Narrative* languished in the Pentagon for almost two years. It wasn’t until

2011 that the report was introduced to the public domain, when former California Congresswoman Jane Harman, in her capacity as the new head of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, published the document and hosted a public debate on its merits, moderated by *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman, who quickly became another key advocate for the *Narrative*.

Slaughter, by then a private citizen at Princeton University, wrote the foreword for the *Narrative* and argued forcefully on behalf of the paper during the Wilson Center debate, along with Friedman and Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor for both Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush. Yet even with this support, the *Narrative* made little impact in Washington. In the end, the *National Strategic Narrative* was met with a big “So what?”

After a two-year push for an integrated strategic conversation, the situation became all too clear: Washington had allowed its strategic muscles to atrophy since the days of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and there was, and remains, little will or capacity to actually do anything that resembles a grand strategy.

In 2011, after 28 years in uniform, Mykleby retired from the Marine Corps and joined the only civilian policy program in Washington that was working on grand strategy. Housed at the think tank New America, the program was founded by Patrick Doherty, a foreign policy and macroeconomics expert who had seen the need for such a strategy while working in conflict zones from the Balkans to the Middle East to sub-Saharan Africa.

Mykleby and Doherty worked out a simple framework for developing a grand strategy: identify the broad contours of a sustainable economic engine that could do the nation’s heavy lifting and tailor the foreign policy to match. By the summer of 2012, they had a full outline. Wary of the vicissitudes of presidential campaign seasons, Mykleby and Doherty waited for the outcome of the general election in November.

President Barack Obama, of course, won reelection and immediately put out a call for big ideas to inform his second term. In the wake of Hurricane Sandy and with the government about to confront a “fiscal cliff,” Mykleby and Doherty sensed the timing was perfect. In early November 2012, Doherty produced a white paper that described the “so what”: a new grand strategy for the United States. By the end of that year, with the help of Lawrence Wilkerson, a long-time aide to



former Secretary of State Colin Powell, and a handful of supporters in the Obama administration, their paper found its way to the Executive Office of the President.

The response from the administration was blunt: “Meets our ambitions, exceeds our expectations.” The big ideas it was looking for turned out to be not so big after all—things like gun control, mapping the brain, and immigration reform. The administration was not expecting a full-on grand strategy. But something else in its response offered a glimmer of hope.

The administration challenged Mykleby and Doherty to produce three ingredients necessary for any administration to consider a new grand strategy: content, coalition, and an implementation plan. In other words, go deeper and broader on the concepts and create a political safe zone for politicians to come together in a bipartisan fashion so the country could begin to adopt a new grand strategy amid the hyperpartisan political environment. In 2014, certain that a Beltway-based effort was not possible, Mykleby and Doherty began that quest, launching the Strategic Innovation Lab at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, in partnership with the change-management specialist Dr. David Cooperrider and, at the invitation of the university’s chairman, Chuck Fowler.

Meanwhile, in 2013, Mykleby met Joel Makower, a celebrated writer and strategist in sustainable business and clean technology. His company, GreenBiz Group, is at the forefront of convening corporations, entrepreneurs, policy makers, and others to explore the technologies, business strategies, and new business models that align business objectives with sustainability and resilience. Makower signed on as a senior fellow at the Strategic Innovation Lab. Suddenly, the pieces fit together: a military strategist, a policy strategist, and a sustainable business strategist who arrived at a similar vision from different disciplines, perspectives, political leanings, even generations. That convergence led to this book.

This book is part of the years-long effort to take the *Narrative* to a deeper level. It tells the story of a grand strategy, born within the Pentagon, to recapture America’s greatness at home and abroad by elevating sustainability as a strategic imperative. It aligns our enduring national interests of prosperity and security with a new framework that blurs the lines between domestic and foreign policy by addressing pressing

economic, security, political, social, and environmental issues at home, and looking at how those issues impact and connect with the global community. It is an inspiring vision of what's possible when Americans hold an optimistic and opportunity-centric view of the future and come together to bring it to reality.

This book is divided into three parts: Part I provides the historical context—the role grand strategy has played in America's history to drive economic growth in a way that supports our national and global interests, and how we can use it again in the twenty-first century. Part II looks at the three pools of demand that represent a massive business opportunity, one that can provide the economic foundation America needs to be strong and resilient. Part III looks at what it will take to bring this scenario to life: the players, institutions, and financing mechanisms we'll need to deploy, and the role that Washington could—but need not—play.

This is no idealistic pipe dream or wonky policy prescription. The story that unfolds weaves together hardnosed economic analysis, a clear-eyed study of demographic and societal shifts, the implications of climate change and resource scarcity, a risk assessment of America's challenges and opportunities, and on-the-ground reporting of solutions that are already being implemented across the nation. By rediscovering the power and discipline of grand strategy—and taking responsibility for our future—we can reimagine the American dream and once again take on what Thomas Paine called “the cause of all mankind.”

In many respects, the collaboration and ideas contained in this book represent the best of the America we intend to illuminate: a nation rooted in a deep and rich history, unbound in its vision, capable of turning seemingly insurmountable challenges into vast new opportunities, always seeking to be an example to the world.