The North Atlantic Treaty Organization celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in Washington on April 23, 1999. Here the representatives of the member states met to discuss the basis for the continuation and expansion of the alliance in the future.

Various important questions were raised at the event, but probably the most serious concerned the role of NATO military forces in any future conflict, as the alliance, initially, had refused to get involved in any military operations outside the geographical region of its member states.

The outcome was a document declaring that NATO would no longer be confined to this fifty-year old principle. Its purpose now would be to safeguard the freedom and security of all its member states by "political and military means." But that is not all! The document described other unthinkable situations that could provoke or justify NATO military intervention!