

10 things you need to know about NATO

- 1. An International Security Hub.** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is one of the world's major international institutions. It is a political and military Alliance of 28 member countries from Europe and North America. The Alliance takes all its decisions by consensus. Every member country, no matter how large or small, has an equal say in discussions and decisions. Member states are committed to individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These values are at the heart of NATO's transatlantic bond.
- 2. Collective Defence.** The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend NATO's territory and populations. Article 5 of NATO's founding charter, the Washington Treaty, sets out the Alliance's collective defence commitment. It states that an attack on one shall be considered an attack on all. Article 5 has been invoked only once in NATO's history, on 12 September 2001, the day after the terrorist attacks on the United States.
- 3. NATO's Command Structure.** NATO has a permanent, integrated military command structure where military and civilian personnel from all member states work together. The Alliance has two top-level Strategic Commands (Allied Command Operations, in Mons, Belgium, and Allied Command Transformation, in Norfolk, United States). Under these Strategic Commands are two Joint Force Commands (in Brunssum, Netherlands and in Naples, Italy) that can deploy and run military operations. The Command Structure also includes one air command (Ramstein, Germany), one land command (Izmir, Turkey) and one maritime command (Northwood, United Kingdom).
- 4. Standing forces.** NATO has a number of standing forces on active duty that contribute to the Alliance's collective defence on a permanent basis. These include NATO's four standing maritime group fleets, which are ready to act when called upon. Additionally NATO has an integrated air defence system that links national air defence capabilities together and includes the Alliance's ballistic missile defence capabilities. The Alliance also conducts several air policing missions in which Allied fighter jets patrol the airspace of member nations who do not have fighter jets of their own. They defend NATO airspace over Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia on a 24/7 basis, 365 days per year.
- 5. Troops and Equipment.** NATO benefits from being able to draw on the military expertise and capabilities of its members. This includes tanks, submarines or fighter jets. When the Alliance collectively decides to conduct an operation it asks Allies for troops and equipment to be placed under NATO command. While personnel serving in a NATO operation are often referred to collectively as "NATO forces," they are strictly speaking multinational forces from NATO member countries, and in some cases, partner countries or other troop-contributing countries. The only military equipment that NATO owns itself is a fleet of AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control) aircraft. From 2018, NATO will also operate five Global Hawk surveillance drones. The procedure for requesting forces and equipment for an operation is often referred to as "force generation."
- 6. NATO funding.** Member countries make direct and indirect contributions to the costs of running NATO and implementing its policies and activities. The greatest part of these contributions is indirect and comes through the Allies' participation in NATO-led operations. Member countries incur the costs involved whenever they volunteer forces to participate in a NATO operation. For example the cost for providing a fighter jet lies with the nation that makes it available. Direct contributions to NATO's common budgets are made by members in accordance with an agreed cost-sharing formula based on relative Gross National Income. These contributions finance the costs of NATO's integrated structures, collectively-owned equipment or installations.
- 7. Deterrence.** In the five decades after World War II, the Alliance successfully prevented the Cold War from becoming "hot". Under the security umbrella provided by NATO, the people of Europe, Canada, and the United States enjoyed the benefits of democratic choice, the rule of law and substantial economic growth. The Alliance's deterrence is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, which remain a core element of NATO's strategy. This is matched by Allies' commitment to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

8. **Crisis Management.** The Alliance has frequently acted to uphold international peace and security. In 1995, NATO helped to end the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and implemented the peace agreement. In 1999, NATO helped to stop mass killings and expulsions in Kosovo, and NATO troops continue to serve in Kosovo to this day under a United Nations mandate. Since 2003, NATO's UN-mandated presence has helped to ensure Afghanistan will never again become a safe haven for terrorists. In 2011, NATO enforced a UN mandate to protect the people of Libya. NATO ships are fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia and are conducting counter-terrorism patrols in the Mediterranean. On several occasions, NATO forces have also delivered relief supplies, including to the United States after Hurricane Katrina and to Pakistan after the October 2005 earthquake.
9. **Cooperative Security.** Threats like terrorism, piracy, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cyber warfare know no borders. That is why NATO has developed a global network of security partners that includes over 40 countries from around the globe, as well as international organisations including the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union. The Alliance's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan includes 14 partner countries. NATO's operation in Kosovo includes 10 partners. Beside partners taking part in NATO missions and operations, the Alliance has developed a wide network of partnerships since the early 1990s, including the Euro-Atlantic Partnerships Council, the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and many partners across the globe, including Australia, Japan and South Korea.
10. **The "Open Door".** Any European state which can contribute to the security and principles of the Alliance can be invited to join. It is up to the country concerned to decide if it wishes to seek membership. On six occasions, between 1952 and 2009, a total of 16 European countries chose to seek membership and were admitted. This process has contributed to peace and security in Europe. At the moment, four countries aspire to membership: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. Allies assess each applicant country according to its own merits. A wide range of political, economic and security reforms need to be implemented before any country can join.

* Turkey recognizes the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name

Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) - Press & Media Section Media Operations Centre (MOC)

Tel.: +32(0)2 707 1010/1002

E-mail: mailbox.moc@hq.nato.int

www.nato.int