10 things you need to know about NATO

1. **Collective defence**: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is group of 28 countries from Europe and North America. NATO exists to protect the people and territory of its members. If one NATO Ally is attacked, then all NATO Allies are attacked. This is called 'collective defence', and is the foundation of our Alliance. When terrorists attacked the United States on 9/11 2001, all NATO Allies stood with America as though they too had been attacked.

    Since 2014, NATO has implemented the biggest increase in its collective defence since the Cold War. For instance, we are now deploying four multinational battlegroups to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. We do this not to provoke a conflict, but to prevent a conflict.

Allied forces training during NATO Exercise Trident Juncture 2015

2. **An Alliance of 28 equals**: The Alliance takes all its decisions by consensus, so all 28 members have to agree before any decisions are taken. We are an Alliance of equals.

3. **Managing crises around the world**: Promoting stability in our neighbourhood and protecting our people at home sometimes means taking action further afield. In the 1990s, NATO stopped further bloodshed in Bosnia and in Kosovo. Since 2003, NATO has helped to ensure that Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for international terrorists. NATO has helped to prevent piracy off the Horn of Africa and, since 2016, has helped to address the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe.

4. **Fighting Terrorism**: NATO plays an important role in fighting terrorism. More than 13,000 NATO troops are training local forces in Afghanistan. NATO is training Iraqi forces to better fight ISIL. NATO AWACS surveillance aircraft support the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL. NATO's new Intelligence Division helps us to anticipate and respond to threats. NATO is also setting up a 'Hub for the South' in Naples to help Allies tackle the threat of terrorism.

NATO troops train and advise the Afghan National Army

5. **Working with our partners**: Threats like terrorism, piracy and cyber warfare know no borders. That is why NATO works with over 40 partner countries around the world, as well as organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union, to spread stability and security.

6. **Troops and Equipment**: Whenever NATO decides to carry out a mission, Allies commit troops and equipment to be placed under NATO command. They become known as "NATO forces". The only military equipment that NATO owns is a fleet of AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control) surveillance aircraft. NATO is also developing a capability for Global Hawk surveillance drones.

7. **NATO's Command Structure**: With so many countries working together, having a clear chain of command is vital. Military and civilian personnel from all member states work together every day within NATO's 'Command Structure'. This includes two top-level Strategic Commands: Allied Command Operations based in Mons in Belgium; and Allied Command Transformation, based in Norfolk in United States.

8. **NATO funding**: Every NATO country contributes to the costs of running the Alliance. By far the biggest contribution comes from Allies' taking part in NATO-led missions and operations. For example, one country might provide fighter jets, while another provides ships or troops. NATO Allies also pay directly to NATO to cover the costs of NATO staff and buildings, its Command Structure, and its jointly-owned equipment, like its AWACS aircraft.

9. **The "Open Door"**: Any country in the Euro-Atlantic area is free to join NATO if it is prepared to meet the standards and obligations of membership, and to contribute to the security of the Alliance. Since 1949, NATO's membership has grown from 12 to 28 countries. Later this year, we will welcome Montenegro as our 29th member of the NATO Alliance.

10. **Cyber Defence**: Cyber-attacks are becoming more common, sophisticated and damaging. Cyber defence is now a top priority for NATO. NATO now recognises cyberspace as an 'operational domain' – just like land, sea and air. NATO helps Allies to boost their cyber defences by sharing information about threats, investing in education and training, and through exercises. NATO also has cyber defence experts that can be sent to help Allies under attack.

Image from Locked Shields 2017,
the world's largest cyber defence exercise, in Estonia.