

The BFPG's 2024 Foreign Policy Calendar

With the war in Ukraine still raging, and the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, 2023 was a year defined by major conflicts. And while these conflicts will continue to define this year as well, 2024 will also be known as a year of elections. This year over 2 billion people, across 50 nations, will vote in elections – a prospect that brings with it both opportunity and challenge for the global system.

To help guide you through what is set to be another turbulent year, BFPG has compiled a list of this year's major global milestones and events and what to look out for in 2024.

January

1st January: Russia Assumes Chairmanship of BRICS



On the 1st January, Russia will assume the rotating Chairmanship of BRICS, an intergovernmental grouping traditionally comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and which recently admitted Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to its ranks. Russia's plans for its Chairmanship include

greater foreign policy coordination between members and strengthening BRICS relations with new partners. This will provide Russia with a key opportunity to strengthen its international partnerships, in the face of ongoing pressures, particularly from the West, stemming from its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

13th January: Taiwan Presidential Election



Taiwan is set to be one of the first nations to head to the ballot box for national elections in 2024. Under the spectre of China's ongoing threats to 'unify' Taiwan with the Mainland, the approach Taiwan should take on China has become one of the biggest issues in the election. The current ruling party (DPP) are pro-independence and support Taiwan developing stronger international relationships, particularly with the United States. Meanwhile, the main opposition party – KMT – are seen as the most amenable to China. They want to strengthen economic links with China, arguing that

dialogue is the best way to peace, and their leader has made a number of recent trips to China. The third candidate, Ko Wen-je who is running for his self-founded Taiwan's People Party (TPP), claims to offer a middle-ground option between the two.

There is no clear front-runner but there are concerns that China may escalate its military threats on Taiwan, should the ruling DPP win re-election. Indeed, Taiwan has already accused China of trying to influence the election away from the DPP through disinformation campaigns.

15th – 19th January: 2024 World Economic Forum Annual Meeting



The 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum will convene in Davos, Switzerland in January. The focus for this year's meeting is on 'Rebuilding Trust'. AI is expected to be high up on this year's

agenda, presenting leaders with an opportunity to follow up on many of the topics discussed at the UK-hosted AI Safety Summit in November 2023.

February

16th – 18th February: 60th Munich Security Conference



Historically, the Munich Security Conference has brought together a wide diversity of world leaders, with the aim of facilitating peace through dialogue. However, with Russia and Iran banned from last year's conference, 2023 marked a change in direction, and highlighted the challenges to the fundamental principles behind building dialogue during times of conflict. It is unknown at this stage whether either nation will be invited to the 2024 Summit, and

their presence would no doubt impact the themes discussed. Nevertheless, priorities for this year's conference are expected to include reviewing Europe's role in security and defence, new visions of the global order, and the security implications of climate change. No doubt, the devastating war in Gaza will also be very high up on the agenda, though the outcome of any talks in that regard will be strongly contingent on who is or isn't allowed to attend the event this year.

24th February: Second Anniversary of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine



Two years on from Russia's invasion, there is little sign of the conflict ending. With Ukraine in urgent need of more support from its allies, to continue to stave off Russia, Ukraine and its most steadfast supporters are likely to use this anniversary to try and renew global support for Ukraine. Support for financial and military commitments has begun to wane among many of Ukraine's key allies, not least the

United States. With many of those allies (e.g. Belgium, Finland, Germany, the US and Romania) also set to go to the ballot in 2024, Ukraine will be concerned about the growing politicisation of military and humanitarian aid to the nation. Ukraine will therefore seek to capitalise on this anniversary to try and sway public and elite opinion in its favour and help meet its needs in this ongoing conflict.

26th – 29th February: World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference



The World Trade Organisation's (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) will take place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates at the end of February. The Conference, which takes place every two years, will convene Ministers from across the world to review the functioning of the multilateral rules-based trading system and the WTO.

The conference occurs against the backdrop of a complex international economic and geopolitical environment, in which tensions are leading to decoupling, deglobalisation, and the risk of fragmentation of the global trading system altogether. It also comes amidst ongoing efforts to reform the organisation and growing pressure to secure agreement on what much-needed reforms will look like.

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March

March: Ukrainian Presidential Election



In March, Ukraine is scheduled to hold a Presidential election. Elections are currently banned in Ukraine while the country is under martial law, with concerns that an election would distract from Ukraine's ability to fight the ongoing war in the country. There are also a number of security and logistical challenges which make running free and fair elections in Ukraine almost impossible at this point in time.

Nonetheless, Ukraine is facing growing pressure from hard-right members of the Republican party in the United States to hold elections. With the United States also going to the polls next year, and Ukraine already facing challenges in securing support from the United States, Ukraine will want to minimise the further politicisation of US aid to Ukraine. Going to the polls may be one way to do that.

1st March: Iranian Legislative Election



At the start of March, Iran will host its first elections since the death of Mahsa Amini. Mahsa died in September 2022 after being detained by the Iranian morality police, sparking nationwide protests. There is little public enthusiasm for the elections and turnout is expected to be low. The hard-line Guardian Council has already disqualified 28% of candidates in the initial screening phase, in an attempt to limit opposition to the ruling Conservatives.

In 2009 disputed election results triggered the Green Movement Protests, some of the biggest demonstrations Iran has ever experienced. While the Iranian government may be able to suppress such protests, should they emerge again, it could force Iran to focus more directly inwards. This would have implications for Iran's position on the world stage but also for the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, within which Iran is one of Hamas' most powerful supporters.

17th March: Russian Presidential Election



The Russian Presidential 'Election' is already a foregone conclusion, with President Putin all but certain to take up his fifth term as President, having made constitutional reforms in 2020 to allow him to stay in power until 2036. A harsh crackdown on opposition, state-run media and the full power of the state means that while Kremlin-

friendly candidates from the 'systemic opposition' are allowed to run, Putin's advisors expect him to receive over 90% of the vote. This will be the first Russian election since the Wagner Group rebellion in June 2023, and Putin will likely seek to use the mandate he'll claim from the 'election' to demonstrate public support for his war in Ukraine and for his regime more broadly.

Spring: UK Hosts the 4th European Political Community Summit



The brainchild of French President Emmanuel Macron, the European Political Community was established in October 2022, to create an informal way for Europe to structure itself and coordinate outside of the EU. After some initial success in coordinating around Ukraine and European energy security, recent summits have struggled to

secure tangible progress on priority issues such as the Armenia/ Azerbaijan conflict. Hosting the EPC for the first time, the UK will hope to use the opportunity to reinvigorate the Grouping and to create opportunities to engage with European partners outside of formal institutions.

April

April – May: Indian General Election



In Spring, the world's largest democracy will go to the polls. A new 28-party opposition coalition – INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) – is the main barrier to Prime Minister Modi's re-election. However, with Modi enjoying an approval rating of 78% and with his party the BJP winning three key elections in the Hindi belt

states last year, Modi is widely expected to win re-election. While in power, Modi has placed significant focus on growing India's international reputation. If he does win re-election, Modi has committed to continuing this ambition, positioning India as an advocate for the Global South and as an alternative to the United States and China.

23rd- 24th April: UK-African Investment Summit



In April, the UK will host the UK-African Investment Summit. Leaders from 25 African countries, as well as representatives from regional and international organisations, have been invited to the UK to meet with business leaders from across the UK and Africa.

The Summit will seek to strengthen UK-African partnerships and promote two-way trade and investment. It will serve as both a test of the UK's efforts to strengthen its relationships in the continent and for its 'patient diplomacy' approach more broadly.



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May

19th – 22nd May: UK Hosts the Education World Forum



Every year, the UK hosts the annual Education World Forum (EWF), the world's largest gathering of education and skills ministers. Last year the Forum was attended by 120 Ministers from 114 nations who

explored how to meet the changing needs of education. The forum is an important annual soft power opportunity for the UK and helps cement the UK's reputation as a leading global education provider.

21st – 24th May: UNCTAD Global Supply Chain Forum 2024



In May, Barbados will hold the first UNCTAD Global Supply Chain Forum. Government officials, as well as business and civil society leaders will gather to explore how to better prepare for future shocks in global supply chains by making supply chains more efficient, sustainable

and resilient. There is expected to be a particular focus on how to alleviate the disproportionate impact of shocks to global supply chains borne by developing nations, including a focus on developing nations' financing needs.

27th May – 1st June: 77th World Health Assembly



World Health Organisation (WHO) member states will convene in Geneva at the end of May for the 77th World Health Assembly. The annual Assembly brings together member states to agree on the WHO's policies, Director-General, and programme budget. The Assembly will also mark the deadline for countries to consider the draft of the Pandemic Preparedness Treaty, although it is not certain

that this deadline will be met. The Treaty is designed to respond to many of the challenges that were faced in creating a global response to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, tensions remain over the level of influence the Treaty would give the WHO and over how to embed equity between high-income and low-and middle-income nations into the Treaty.

June

6th – 9th June: European Parliament Elections



In June, the European Union will go to the polls, in the first elections for the European Parliament since the UK officially left the bloc on January 31, 2020. While few candidates are advocating for further departures from the bloc, nationalist groups are growing in influence across EU member states, including nations such as Italy, France and the

Netherlands. It is hard to predict at this stage how the election will go but it is widely expected that right-wing Eurosceptics will gain more influence, while the Greens will lose seats. This will inevitably impact the role that the EU seeks to play on the world stage, not least around climate leadership.

13th – 15th June: 2024 G7 Summit



Italy is the 2024 G7 President. This year's Summit will be held in Puglia (Apulia), which was chosen as a city that has "acted as a bridge between East and West", in an effort to align with the Summit's focus on the Global

South. The Summit's agenda is expected to focus on support for Ukraine, unity among the G7, respect for the rules-based-order, economic security, energy security, migration, and cooperation with Africa.

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July

1st July: Hungary Assumes EU Presidency



At the start of July, Hungary is scheduled to take over the rotating EU Presidency, much to the concern of many within the EU. In June 2023, a resolution was passed, with an overwhelming majority in the European Parliament questioning whether Hungary could credibly assume the Presidency, given its track record of compliance with EU law and values. Hungary has been strongly critiqued within

the EU for democratic backsliding, its attitudes to minorities, and undermining the rule of law. President Orban's meeting with President Putin in October 2023, has only compounded concerns about a Hungarian Presidency. Postponing or cancelling Hungary's Presidency is theoretically possible but is unlikely. Instead, there will likely be significant efforts by the EU to limit the impact Hungary is able to have as President.

9th – 11th July: NATO Summit



Formed in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II, 2024 will mark the 75th Anniversary of the formation of NATO. This year's Summit will be hosted in Washington D.C and will be the first NATO Summit attended by Sweden, provided their accession receives ratification by Turkey and Hungary in time. This year's summit is expected to

focus on key conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, the Western Balkans and China. However, with 2024 a major election year, one of the biggest challenges for NATO in 2024 will be avoiding the politicisation of support for NATO and securing ongoing commitment to the organisation among new leaders, not least in the United States.

26th July – 8th September: 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games



Athletes from all over the world will gather in the summer for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games taking place in Paris, in what France hopes will be the most sustainable Games in history. While first and foremost a sporting competition, the Olympic Games have long been the site of geopolitical contestation. Having been banned

following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, individual athletes from Russia and Belarus will now be allowed to compete as 'neutral' athletes, as long as they have not supported the war in Ukraine. However, Russian President Putin has yet to confirm whether Russian athletes will compete under these conditions.

August

15th August: Third anniversary of the Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan



This August marks three years since the Taliban swept into power in Afghanistan, following the much-criticised handling of the withdrawal of NATO, UK and United States forces, and the subsequent fall of the Afghan Government. Afghanistan continues to face multiple inter-connected crises, from economic hardship to humanitarian suffering and the exclusion of women and girls from society. This

anniversary will likely be used by the international community as an opportunity to reassert that international recognition, sanctions relief and development assistance remain predicated on immediate humanitarian and security improvements by the Taliban, and to call for global recommitment to provide assistance to the large swathes of Afghan society in need.

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September

18th September: Ten year anniversary of the Scottish Independence Referendum



In 2014, Scotland opted not to become independent of the UK, by a ratio of 55% to 44%. Ten years on and the calls for another referendum remain loud, with supporters pointing to Brexit (which 62% of Scottish voters voted against) and growing support for independence as justification for re-holding the Referendum. However, there is little prospect of the UK Government granting another referendum,

and the UK Supreme Court has ruled out the Scottish Parliament holding a referendum without Westminster's permission.

Nonetheless, the 10 year anniversary will no doubt be used by pro-independence campaigners to try and catalyse pressure for another referendum, particularly if the UK General Election is not held until November.

22nd – 23rd September: UN Summit of the Future



The first ever UN Summit of the Future will be held in September. The Summit aims to rebuild trust in, and strengthen the effectiveness of, multilateralism. Billed by the United Nations as a 'once-in-a-generation opportunity' to reinvigorate international cooperation, the Summit

will push for states to reaffirm their existing global commitments, including to the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Charter, and to adopt a Pact for the Future. The Pact is expected to cover five key areas – sustainable development, peace and security, science and tech, youth, and global governance.

October

October: 2024 BRICS Summit



Hosted in Kazan, Russia, this year's BRICS Summit will be the first to welcome its expanded membership. While the expanded grouping provides opportunities for its members to strengthen relations with a wider range of nations, it will also bring with it a number of inter-group tensions. The expansion project already took a blow when the newly elected Argentinian President Javier Milei withdrew from plans to join the bloc, just a week before Argentina was set

to join. Within the newly expanded group, particular tensions remain. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, for example, have long been strained due to both nations' efforts to obtain regional dominance. Among existing members too, there is often a struggle for cohesion – China and India are often at odds, and while China and Russia are keen for the bloc to be seen as a counterpoint to the West, others such as Brazil and India, still maintain strong relations with the West.

1st October: 75th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China



In 2024, the People's Republic of China will celebrate 75 years since its formation. The 1st October is a National Day in China every year, with a 'Golden Week' of celebrations. The 75th Anniversary is expected to be marked by particularly lavish military parades and celebrations.

The 70th Anniversary celebrations occurred against the backdrop of major protests in Hong Kong and China will be keen to limit the opportunities for the Anniversary to become a flashpoint of dissent.

7th October: Anniversary of the Israel-Hamas War



The 7th October will mark one year since Hamas' surprise attack on Israel, and the subsequent and devastating escalation in conflict and violence in Gaza.

It is impossible to predict at this stage what the situation will look like in October but there is potential for the anniversary to present a flashpoint in both war or peacetime.

21st October: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting



Leaders of the Commonwealth nations meet every two years, and in 2024 the meeting will be held in Samoa. This year's theme will be 'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth', which will focus on how the contemporary Commonwealth can work together to boost resilience, innovation, growth, and sustainability.

This will be the first Heads of Government Meeting with the new Head of the Commonwealth, King Charles III. King Charles will likely seek to use the meeting to bring some stability to the role of Head of the Commonwealth, following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II at a time when many Commonwealth nations are looking to remove the British monarch as their Head of State

21st October – 1st November: 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16)



Following Turkey's withdrawal of its offer to host COP16, citing devastation caused by earthquakes in the country in February 2023, Colombia has been confirmed as the new host for COP16. As one of the most biodiverse nations in the world, biodiversity is of critical

importance to Colombia. The conference, which is held every two years, will look to build on the deal struck at the 2022 conference in Montreal, which committed to preserving 30 percent of the planet's land and seas by 2030.

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November

Autumn: UK Election



Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said that he expects the next general election to be held in the second half of 2024, although it could be called any time before the end of January 2025. While the foreign policy positions of the two main parties – Conservatives and Labour – vary less significantly than their domestic policies, there are a number of areas where the two diverge.

The sharpest of these is in regard to the EU, with Labour more amenable than the Conservatives to working more closely with the EU. This may well come at the expense of its focus on other regions, including the Indo-Pacific, which has been a key pillar of the current government's international efforts. Meanwhile, and

while there has been relatively little to separate the two parties on the conflict in the Middle East so far, the large pro-Palestinian movement within the Labour Party membership may well cause it to ultimately diverge from the current Government's stance.

Elsewhere, the two parties tend to place slightly different emphasis on strategic interests vs values, and their relative predisposition for military vs humanitarian aid. The election may therefore impact how the UK engages with nations such as China, and others with poor human rights records, and for the prospects of 'patient diplomacy' which the current government has sought to pursue.

November 2024: Global AI Safety Summit



In 2023, the UK hosted the Global AI Safety Summit, the first global AI Summit, which saw world leaders, as well as business and tech leaders, including Elon Musk, gather to discuss the future of AI safety and regulation. A follow-up mini virtual Summit will be co-hosted

by the UK and the Republic of Korea in April 2024, with the next in-person summit to be held in France in November 2024. France has already successfully positioned itself as an AI leader in Europe and will seek to use its hosting responsibilities to strengthen its reputation in this field.

5th November: United States Presidential Election



The US Presidential election in November will no doubt be one of, if not the most, globally significant. The two main parties – the Democrats and the Republicans – are adopting increasingly divergent stances on key global issues including Ukraine, China and NATO, but also trade, immigration and aid. The outcome of the elections will therefore have significant implications for the role the United States seeks to play in the world, and in turn, how other global actors decide to act.

With the world watching, the US election will also act as the biggest global advert (and test) for democracy, with implications for how much other nations value their own democracy. And regardless of the outcome, with the US focused inwards on its election, 2024 will be a year in which its attention on the international sphere may wane. Other nations, including the UK, will be forced to step up, not least because strategic rivals may seek to take advantage of a distracted US, with security implications all over the world, not least in Taiwan and Ukraine.

11th – 22nd November: 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29)



Under UN rules, an Eastern European nation had to be the 2024 COP President. With Russia vetoing bids from all EU nations and Armenia and Azerbaijan blocking each other's bids, the decision was in gridlock for months, before Azerbaijan was confirmed as the host at the end of 2023. This leaves the nation little time to prepare for a Presidency that is usually agreed years in advance, and the

nation's reputation as a major oil and gas producer, as well as its human rights record have quickly fallen under scrutiny.

Its priorities for COP29 are not yet known, although many of the debates that dominated COP28, not least around phasing out fossil fuels and climate finance, will no doubt continue to dominate discussions.

18th – 19th November: The G20 Rio de Janeiro Summit



Brazil will host the 2024 G20 Presidency, under the theme 'A Just World and Sustainable Planet'. Brazil hopes to make progress on its three main priorities for its Presidency – social inclusion and world poverty, renewable energy and global economic governance. Brazilian President Lula da Silva is expected to cast himself as a voice of

the Global South, an image that will be helped by the African Union joining the Summit as a permanent member, following its accession. However, with last year's G20 Summit struggling to secure a communique, and growing divides in the Group on many of the biggest geopolitical challenges of the day, Lula will have a difficult task ahead in securing progress among the grouping.