

# China Will Accelerate Climate Resilience as a Security Priority

Taylah Bland

## What We're Watching

Having experienced particularly disastrous extreme weather events in 2023 — due in part to the intensification of the impacts of a changing global climate that increasingly threaten China — we should expect Beijing to devote a growing share of its attention to domestic climate resilience and adaptation measures in 2024.



Photo by Jade Gao/AFP via Getty Images

## The Context

China was hit by a number of climate-induced extreme weather events in 2023, including a period of unrelenting summer rain that caused intense flooding around the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. At one point, precipitation exceeded 60% of a typical year's rain in just 83 hours; Beijing experienced its heaviest rainfall in 140 years. Nearly two million people were affected by flooding, causing nearly a hundred deaths; much of the major agricultural region's crops were destroyed, and economic losses totaled more than \$13 billion. Meanwhile, China's northwest suffered a record-breaking heat-wave, with temperatures in parts of Xinjiang breaking 125 degrees Fahrenheit in July 2023.

These highlight the increasingly difficult climate environment faced by China, in which such extreme scenarios may become increasingly common. For Beijing, this is a political issue. Throughout Chinese history, extreme weather events — particularly flooding — and ruling governments' ability to respond to them have traditionally been viewed by the populace as a key test of legitimacy. Failure to respond effectively to natural disasters was frequently taken as an omen that a dynasty had lost the "mandate of heaven" — and indeed often played an instrumental role in the fall of governments. Chinese leadership is today keenly aware that they too must be able to effectively handle a changing climate and its impacts at home.

In 2022, China published a "National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2022–2035)," which aimed to strengthen China's societal and economic resilience to climate change. It promotes proactive adaptation by monitoring and predicting extreme weather, as well as increasing agricultural, water, and urban resilience, among other targets. But this ambitious strategy requires significant development and coordination among government departments, as well as significant investment of capital, labor, and bureaucratic attention.

## What to Expect in 2024

- Acknowledging extreme weather as the new normal, Beijing will substantially increase its prioritization of domestic climate adaptation and resilience efforts, including comprehensive disaster prevention and response, to reduce its vulnerability.

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- This effort will be framed as an issue of national security, overlapping with other high-priority security issues favored by Xi Jinping, including food, water, energy, and infrastructure security.
- Chinese climate adaptation and resilience efforts will proceed regardless of the result of climate change negotiations at the international level but will need to accelerate.
- The Chinese public will become more aware of severe weather events and increasingly begin to make the connection between them and climate change.