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## Loaded warnings of space debris risk

After China launched a Long March 5B rocket carrying the Tianhe space station's core module into orbit on April 28, some US media organizations and experts started hyping up the possibility of debris from the rocket plunging into inhabited areas, causing casualties.

Even if the Chinese Manned Space Engineering Office had not issued a statement on Sunday reporting that the remains of the rocket had re-entered the atmosphere earlier that day and landed in the Indian Ocean, causing no casualties, anyone with any common sense will appreciate that the scaremongering was intended to smear China's space endeavors.

Dozens of rockets are launched into space every year by various countries, including the United States, but never have so many US media outlets acted in concert with experts and space agencies to sensationalize the risk posed by debris from a rocket.

"Heads up!" they cried, claiming the debris could fall on New York.

There might have been some validity to such warnings had they come decades earlier when humans had just entered the space era and the technology was still being tried and tested. However, these reports have come when rocket launches are routine.

It is instructive to note that the US media described debris from SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket as lighting up the night sky above Seattle when it fell to Earth in late March, while alleging that the Chinese rocket was "undirected", "uncontrolled" and "out-of-control" and its debris could fall on an inhabited area.

Just like any other space rocket, most of the Long March 5B vehicle would have burned up during its final plunge through the atmosphere, and the chances of anyone being hit by the debris were no greater than they would be for any other rocket.

In the attempt to sling mud on China's space endeavors, many parties have given a silent burial to their professional ethics and codes of conduct. So when US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement that "It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris", it became absolutely clear that it is China's space ambitions that the US is targeting.

Although it is necessary to find ways to better control the reentry of space hardware into the Earth's atmosphere, it should not be forgotten that the chance of being hit by rocket debris, whatever country it is from, is much smaller than that of one being hit by a precision-guided missile or drone fired by the US, particularly for those people living in countries that cannot afford a space dream.