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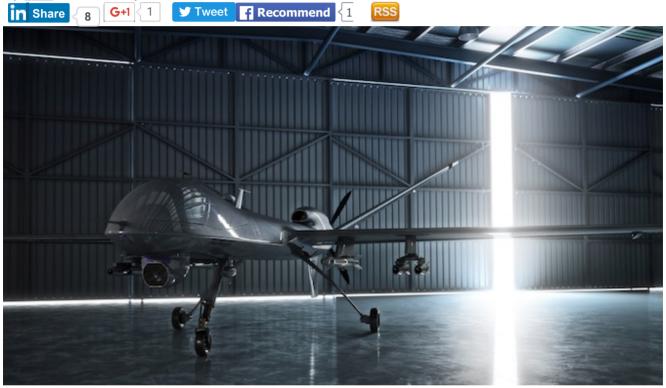
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# Pentagon Award to Recognize US Drone Operators

By AFP on January 07, 2016



The US military will create a new way to recognize drone operators and other service members who contribute to America's fighting efforts from afar.

According to a Pentagon memo due out Thursday, the military will introduce a new "R" designation -- known as a "device" -- that can be attached to medals given to drone operators and other non-combat troops, such as cyber warriors who hack enemy networks.

The new honor comes as part of a yearlong Pentagon review of how the US military gives awards, sometimes criticized as taking too long or being too stringent.

Among the report's other recommendations are that the cases of about 1,100 medals given for bravery be reevaluated to see if they could be upgraded.

Some of those medals could in theory be increased to Medal of Honor -- the military's highest award.

"Although there is no indication that members were inappropriately recognized, the secretary determined that unusual Medal of Honor awards trends reported by the recent Military Decorations and Awards Review justified a review," the Pentagon said in a statement.

Only 17 troops have been given Medals of Honor in America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, far

fewer than in previous conflicts, such as the Vietnam War.

The US military is struggling to recruit and retain sufficient operators to fly the thousands of drones currently deployed across the Middle East, Afghanistan and parts of Africa.

Drone pilots have complained of low morale, long hours and of the psychological impacts stemming from killing people remotely.

"As the impact of remote operations on combat continues to increase, the necessity of ensuring those actions are distinctly recognized grows," the memo states.

The "R" (for remote) will be a small bronze letter that can be affixed to a medal ribbon, and will be awarded to "service members who use remote technology to directly impact combat operations."

Former defense secretary Chuck Hagel nixed a proposed new combat medal for US troops who launch drone strikes or cyber attacks, after a torrent of criticism from veterans and lawmakers.

Hagel opted to <u>scrap the new "Distinguished Warfare Medal"</u> for a device that could be added to existing medals.

Current Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who started his job in February, is expected to sign off on the changes Thursday.

The Pentagon is also creating a new "C" designation for medals that were earned during combat.

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