

Pentagon creates new medal for cyber, drone warriors

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Outgoing US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta takes his seat as he arrives for his final press conference in the Pentagon briefing room on February 13, 2013 in Washington, DC.

The Pentagon unveiled a new medal on Wednesday to honor "extraordinary" troops who launch cyber attacks or drone strikes from their consoles, even if they do not risk their lives in combat.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, announcing the new "Distinguished Warfare Medal," said it was time to recognize those who play a crucial role in [modern warfare](#) with hi-tech weapons far from the frontline.

"Our military reserves its highest decorations obviously for those who display gallantry and valor in actions where their lives are on the line, and we will continue to do so," Panetta told a Pentagon news conference.

"But we should also have the ability to honor the extraordinary actions that make a true difference in combat operations."

He said operators of unmanned, robotic aircraft and [cyber weapons](#) "contribute to the success of combat operations, particularly when they remove the enemy from the field of battle, even if those actions are physically removed from the fight."

The medal reflects a new age of warfare that emerged over the past decade featuring robotic weapons and digital combat.

Predator and Reaper drones armed with Hellfire missiles and bombs have been used to kill insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan and by the CIA to go after suspected Al-Qaeda militants in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere. Other robotic aircraft, including the stealthy RQ-170 Sentinel and larger Global Hawks, are used to spy on adversaries from the sky without putting pilots in harm's way.

The military also views cyberspace as a new battlefield and has created a new command dedicated to digital warfare, recruiting and training new "cyber warriors."

The power of digital weapons was driven home by a [cyber attack](#) that reportedly disrupted Iran's uranium facilities in 2009-2010, which the New York Times said was carried out by US and Israel [spy agencies](#).

The medal is designed as a brass pendant medal, nearly two inches tall, that will carry a laurel wreath encircling a globe with a Defense Department eagle at its center, attached to a red, white and blue striped ribbon.

The medal will only be given to troops for their role in operations that took place after the attacks of September 11, 2001 but, unlike other military medals, will not require that the soldier performed a courageous physical act that put his or her life in danger.

The new medal will be ranked higher than the Bronze Star, the fourth highest combat decoration, but lower than the Silver Star, officials said.

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