

Michelle A. Hughes, Esq.

Michelle Hughes is the Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of VALRAC Innovation, LLC, a company dedicated to preparing the next generation to restore and strengthen the rule of law at home and abroad. She is also Chief of Global Strategy for InternetBar.org, Inc., Senior Development Advisor to Loyola University Chicago School of Law's L.L.M. program in Rule of Law for Development, a Fellow with the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, and a Senior Fellow with the National Defense University Joint Forces Staff College.



Ms. Hughes was formerly a Senior Executive in the U.S. Department of Defense, where she was the only designated “Highly Qualified Expert” for Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform (SSR). Her work focuses on building capacity for multi-national, interagency, civil-military and public-private cooperation to build and strengthen the rule of law, resolve violent conflict, and enable sustainable peace. She has field experience in 12 conflict countries across four continents, to include a succession of deployments to Afghanistan where her role was to advise Senior Military Commanders on how to connect security force development to governance and justice. From December 2010 to December 2011, she was the Senior Rule of Law Advisor to the NATO Police Training Mission in Afghanistan. She is the principal author of the Joint Force Commander’s Handbook on Military Support to Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform.

Prior to her government appointment, Ms. Hughes was the Principal Director, Rule of Law for General Dynamics-Information Technology. In that position, Ms. Hughes provided executive level consultation and assistance on International Law, Rule of Law, and SSR. She participated in SSR-related activities in Ghana, Colombia, Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Albania, and mentored the U.S. Interagency SSR assessment for Joint Task Force-435 (Afghanistan). She has worked extensively with leading U.S. government departments and agencies including the United States Agency for International Development, the State Department, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice. She also worked in collaboration with multinational partners, rule of law non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and peacekeeping centers around the world.

Originally from Buffalo, New York, Ms. Hughes graduated from the University of Florida in 1979 where she obtained a BA in English and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army. As a Military Intelligence Officer, Ms. Hughes was one of the first women to serve in the elite 82nd Airborne Division, and the only woman officer ever assigned to the Army’s Parachute Demonstration Team, “The Golden Knights.” She was honored by President Reagan as one of the “Top 10 Working Women of 1985” and subsequently served in combat in Panama. Prior to leaving active duty as a Major, Ms. Hughes led the U.S. Counternarcotics Intelligence Support Team in Bogotá, Colombia.

In 1996, Ms. Hughes graduated at the top of her class from Regent University School of Law. While in law school, she was an editor of the Law Review, and received numerous academic honors and awards. She has practiced complex civil litigation, prosecution, and criminal defense in 14 State and Federal jurisdictions. She has special expertise in real property law, alternative dispute resolution, and government and military structures, and has served on drafting committees for uniform commercial codes. Her clients have included multinational corporations in the extractive, manufacturing and maritime industries, Fortune 500 Companies, municipalities, and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Immediately following 9/11, as a Reserve Lieutenant Colonel, Ms. Hughes was recalled to active duty in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. During that time, she served as the Chief of Intelligence Production for the U.S. European Command where she was responsible for the strategic design and implementation of U.S. military intelligence production within the European Theater of Operations.

Ms. Hughes is co-author and co-editor of the forthcoming book, “Impunity: Confronting Illicit Power Structures in War and Transition,” scheduled to be published by NDU Press in early 2015. She has two children and three stepchildren, and is a proud Marine Corps Mom. She can be reached through her website at www.michelle-hughes.com or blog at ruleoflawlady.blogspot.com.