

In Our Own Words

Thoughts on the experience of evacuation and extended separation

Three people, three worries

- “My husband spent months living and working in a place that was mortared almost daily, surrounded by military and private security professionals who did amazing, incredibly courageous work to keep their personnel alive and operations functioning. He also worked with other civilians like himself who risked life and limb every day to do the serious work of reconstruction and preparing the way for democracy. Then he came home to a place where nothing seemed very important; in fact it all seemed downright petty, mindless, and stupid, including the people here. He expressed anger and frustration that everyone around him could be so lacking in heroism and valor. I felt lumped in with that assessment, and it hurt a lot.”
- “I learned on my husband's return home that one of the big questions between us was trust, i.e., his ability to trust that I could or would be faithful to him while he was away. In fact it resulted in a serious crisis in our relationship. Though we have for the most part moved on, the TDY in effect precipitated a major rift in our mutual trust and understanding, and we are still recovering from that.”
- “My wife, a Foreign Service Officer, has been in Iraq for nearly 18 months, while I was posted overseas with another agency. I was recently deployed to Baghdad for a six-month stint with another NGO. So in a real sense, I write from both sides of the divide caused by single-status posts.

I have only a couple of points which I hope will be helpful to those still enduring separation. First, while I was in my previous post, I worried constantly about my wife, and frankly paid little attention to her attempts at reassuring me. After a month here, I think I can truly say that as weird as the situation is here for us in the International Zone, as Spartan as living conditions are for many of us, and as long as the working hours may be, overall circumstances are nowhere near as dangerous as portrayed on TV. Security is at a high level and is competently provided by both military and civilian sources. On a day in, day out basis, having made the necessary adjustments to the peculiarities of life here, I personally feel no more unsafe than I would working in, for example, Washington D.C. -- especially if I was working there into the evening hours.

My second point is harder to explain. I worried about my wife before I arrived because there simply was no way that, on the one hand, her voluminous

explanations of how 'ordinary' life went on here and, on the other hand, the news stories I read or watched could convey to me how things really are. So I rather expect that my attempts now to reassure my ex-colleagues in the group won't really do much to reduce your concerns and worries. Nevertheless, I can honestly say that, if somehow I had been able to spend a week or so here early in my wife's tour, I know I would still have worried but I also would have been more accepting of her reassurances."