

## Cuba Series, Part 1: The Bay Of Pigs



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David R. Kotok(<https://Kotokreport.Com/Author/Christopher/>) • Reading Time: 5 Minutes



I'm going to start this multipart series about Cuba with a report of my personal visit to a region outside the Havana area. Readers will see why shortly. So, here's Cuba Series, Part 1: Bay of Pigs.

This very recent trip to Cuba (January 14–20, 2024) was my fourth. It was the third one where I was chairing or co-chairing a GIC delegation ([www.interdependence.org](http://www.interdependence.org) (<https://www.interdependence.org/>)). The first trip was

right after the Obama “opening up” initiative, when I was seeking information about Cuba and Zika. (The pamphlet I published on Zika is available here: <https://www.cumber.com/sites/default/files/2021-08/Zika-Pamphlet-by-David-R-Kotok.pdf> (<https://www.cumber.com/sites/default/files/2021-08/Zika-Pamphlet-by-David-R-Kotok.pdf>)).) The second trip was my first GIC delegation to Cuba and was before Covid, in 2019. The third was a year ago.

This time, we were a total of 16 on a US State Department-licensed “people-to-people” trip. Collectively we were physicians, teachers, musicians, investors, bankers, lawyer, policy wonks, and a student; we came from different geographical parts of the US. We had to face restrictions about where we could stay, where we could eat, and where we could go. Cuba was designated a state sponsor of terrorism by President Donald Trump six days after the Jan 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, events in Washington and seven days before Trump left office. There is not a single shred of evidence of any sort suggesting that any Cubans were involved in the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on the US capitol, and President Obama had removed Cuba from the state sponsor of terrorism list in 2015. For reference, other designated countries on the day we departed for Cuba were North Korea, Iran, and Syria. Note that the Houthis were just designated by the State Department as a “global terrorist” group. I will discuss Cuba’s redesignation in future Cuba Series commentaries. 

We visited the Museo Girón, which commemorates Cuba’s decisive victory in the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion by US-sponsored Cuban exiles (see <https://www.historyhit.com/locations/museo-playa-giron/> (<https://www.historyhit.com/locations/museo-playa-giron/>)). At the entrance to the museum we met a gentleman called Manuel. Here I am with him in the museum foyer:

I spoke with him with the help of an interpreter. (While several in our group spoke Spanish fluently, I do not speak it well enough and needed the help.)

Manuel is now 83. He was a teenager and was in his house when the first Bay of Pigs explosions occurred – the first plane dropped a bomb near him. He told us what the surprise attack was like for him and his family. They had not been warned, although there may have been those in the Fidel Castro leadership who were warned. He didn’t say. There are diverse opinions about who knew what and when they knew it.

Manuel described how he had to go to an armory to get a rifle (he walked or ran) and join the local militia fighters who repelled the invaders. He was engaged in the battle. He didn’t say which “prong” of the attack he defended against. There were several. For our group, there was a chance to see one of them. The road to the museum has markers and battle line monuments so that the frontlines of the battle are depicted for tourists.

I asked Manuel if he spoke with any of the more than 1100 prisoners that were taken (of the 1400-member invasion force, of whom about 100 were killed). He said he hadn’t had much conversation when he was guarding them. They were assembled and he helped do that. Then they were turned over to others to hold until their release was negotiated. The exchange was for \$53 million worth of food and medicine. That was the value in 1961 dollars.

Manuel and I discussed a little more of the history, and then we moved on to his service in the Cuban military. The Bay of Pigs experience turned him into a soldier from a farmer. He is a veteran of 43 years of service. He has a medal for his service, which you can see in the photo.

Manuel and I exchanged some remarks on current events. He is two years older than I am. My US Army time was in the 1960s. We compared notes about military service in a brief way. I suggested that if people of goodwill would only try to talk with each other instead of promoting hatred of each other, the world could be a better place. He agreed completely. We looked at each other in silence and then shook hands firmly. We affirmed that we are not enemies, that we are just two old men who would prefer peace to war. I saw the moisture in his eyes, and he saw the same in mine. There's not much to add beyond that.

There's a Bay of Pigs Museum in Miami, too. It tells the story with a different lens. Here's the link: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g34438-d4155493-Reviews-Bay\\_of\\_Pigs\\_Museum-Miami\\_Florida.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g34438-d4155493-Reviews-Bay_of_Pigs_Museum-Miami_Florida.html) ([https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g34438-d4155493-Reviews-Bay\\_of\\_Pigs\\_Museum-Miami\\_Florida.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g34438-d4155493-Reviews-Bay_of_Pigs_Museum-Miami_Florida.html))

And here's a website look at the Museo Girón, where I met

Manuel: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/museo-giron> (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/museo-giron>)



Once, readers contemplate the differences between the two museums, perhaps you might also contemplate what might happen if the surviving elders in each place were to set aside their politics and arrange a mutual visit. Imagine a handshake and a people to people exchange visit between these two museums that are only about 100 miles from each other. The American Airlines flight between Miami and Santa Clara airport, Cuba takes about an hour.

Segue.

Down the street from the museum is what appears to be a beautiful resort, the Hotel Playa Girón (<https://www.hotels.com/ho312181984/hotel-playa-giron-playa-giron-cuba/> (<https://www.hotels.com/ho312181984/hotel-playa-giron-playa-giron-cuba/>)). It is a modern and newer construction resort. There is a lovely beach and pool and all the other amenities one finds in a tropical Caribbean holiday spot. The reviews on the website are awful, they are pre-covid timeframe or during covid period. I cannot say if the resort is improved.

Our group didn't stay there. Why? Because the US sanctions prevent us from staying there. The Canadians, Europeans, Asians, and others from around the world can stay, play, and partake there. But not we Americans. Readers are invited to contemplate what I just wrote.

It is clear that there is a growing tourism trade in Cuba. I saw it. But it is not American. Nearly everyone else in the world is visiting or investing in the new entrepreneurial initiatives that Cuba is permitting now. Not Americans. We're shut out by our own government. More to come on that in future Cuba missives.

For more on the Bay of Pigs, see either museum's depictions and also Peter Wyden well-known book *The Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (<https://www.amazon.com/Bay-Pigs-Untold-Story/dp/0671254138> (<https://www.amazon.com/Bay-Pigs-Untold-Story/dp/0671254138>)). The book was written in 1979, and since then there have been additional discussions and updated books by others. Here's a screenshot of Fidel holding a copy of Wyden's book, from the 1979 documentary *Cuba and the Cameraman*, by Jon Alpert (<https://www.netflix.com/title/80126449> (<https://www.netflix.com/title/80126449>)).



(<https://i0.wp.com/mcusercontent.com/d6f020f3bd6a1e2c4eb254e6c/images/c050fcf6-22bb-4fe8-2c64-bd35e2587283.jpg?ssl=1>)

A personal closing note.

A few years ago, I had a conversation with Ambassador Vicki Huddleston. She is a diplomat who served as America's Ambassador to Cuba among her assignments. Her service was under two different presidents and her book is recommended. See: *Our Woman in Havana: A Diplomat's Chronicle of America's Long Struggle with Castro's Cuba*. Anyway, she described her first meeting with Fidel Castro when she was posted to the American embassy in Havana. Castro asked her "What do you do?" at the State Department. She answered "Oh, I'm in charge of Cuba."

She said that he looked at her for a moment and then smiled. He said "Oh, I thought I was."

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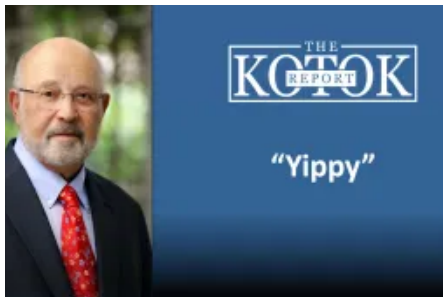
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