

Naughty Boxes and Privatization:
Mauricio Claver-Carone and Corruption in Post-Maduro
Venezuela

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A [mastermind](#) of Trump’s hardline Latin American policies, Mauricio Claver-Carone no longer serves in the administration, but according to well-placed sources, he’s “picking who can operate” in Venezuela, controlling access to the government and creating conflicts of interest. Speaking with reporters on May 21, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that Venezuelan “President” Delcy Rodriguez was on her way to New Delhi to discuss energy issues, and that he would be in India as well. “This is an important trip, I’m glad we’re able to do it,” Rubio chirped after explaining the trio of nations would discuss how to increase Venezuelan oil sales to India *[she has destroyed Chavez's social welfare programs at the behest of the USA, I'm also convinced she has learning disabilities, or is slightly retarded. She'll do anything to satisfy those with more power]*.

His statement – and his announcement of Rodriguez's trip

before she had – perfectly illustrated Washington's newfound dynamic with the Venezuelan government. Following over 20 years of hostile relations, the US Secretary of State was apparently so intimately involved with day to day affairs in Caracas that he was claiming responsibility for Rodriguez's international itinerary. In fact, Rubio's influence over Rodriguez is said to be traced to one “gatekeeper,” former Trump Latin America envoy Mauricio Claver-Carone [Trump [stated](#), with a smile, that he intended to make Venezuela America's 51st state].

The Grayzone wrote: “Mauricio [Claver-Carone] is picking who can operate [in politics] and Delcy [Rodriguez] is taking instructions.” A former senior US official with access to leadership in both Caracas and Washington offered the same assessment, remarking to The Grayzone, “Mauricio's calling the shots on private sector economic positions, and if anyone wants in, they have to go to him.”

1.

Hand-selected by former National Security Advisor John Bolton to serve as his Latin America charge during Trump's first term, Claver-Carone no longer occupies an official governmental role. Instead, he has leveraged his legacy in the public sector to establish a Miami-based investment firm called the [Lara Fund](#) which could become

a key player in the MAGA financial feeding frenzy in Caracas.

Described by the *New York Times* as the “architect of Trump’s tough Latin America policies,” Claver-Carone is a Cuban-American regime change zealot who once engaged in fisticuffs with Cuban diplomats as a young man. During Trump's first term, he unleashed a financial “flamethrower” on Cuba, issuing scores of new sanctions that unraveled the Obama-era normalization policy and plunged the island back into economic misery.

Claver-Carone has similarly masterminded many of the policies that define Trump's relationship with Venezuela, from its recognition of the previously unknown Juan Guaido as the country’s “interim president” to the deportation of hundreds of Venezuelan migrants from the US to El Salvador's maximum security CECOT prison. Many of those migrants had been prompted to journey to the US by the economically crushing sanctions unleashed at Claver-Carone's direction [*were they?*]

2

The Grayzone's sources described the Trump veteran as the architect of the military invasion that saw Maduro spirited away to a federal penitentiary and installed Rodriguez as “president” following a stand-down by Venezuelan security forces. “If he was in charge of

implementing the kinetic side, maybe [Rodriguez] thinks she has to listen to him on finance,” the Venezuela insider said of Claver-Carone.

A report this January by investigative journalist Aram Roston described Claver-Carone as a “key backer” of Rodriguez following Maduro's abduction, and cited sources who claimed he exercised decisive influence over Venezuela policy despite having left the administration. Claver-Carone is now said to be at the heart of the most sensitive and consequential task Venezuela faces: the restructuring of its \$170 billion in defaulted debt. Forced from several previous positions by corruption scandals and rancorous clashes, an operative with no official governmental position appears to be shaping the economic contours of Project Venezuela [*that's how oligarchy works*].

This May [2026], the US Treasury Department authorized Caracas to hire a financial advisor to assist with the herculean task of restructuring its debt. The Venezuelan government [selected](#) Centerview Partners, a top-drawer investment and financial advisory firm based in New York City. According to the former US senior official, Claver-Carone's romantic partner and business colleague, Jessica Bedoya, boarded a private jet to Caracas soon after the big announcement, arriving with a top advisor from Centerview. It was her second trip to the Venezuelan

capital, they said, after visiting in February to discuss financial matters. Claver-Carone did not respond to calls to his personal phone from The Grayzone, or to detailed questions sent by text and email. His partner, Bedoya, is the founder of the Lara Fund investment firm where he serves as managing partner. Her bio notes that she has also worked in the CIA and National Security Council.

Some insiders worry that her reported presence in the Venezuelan capital, together with Claver-Carone's outsized influence, could represent a conflict of interest, allowing them to steer debt restructuring agreements to their own personal benefit [*Oh really? No kidding?*] “Now he's got a lock on everything,” the Venezuela insider said of Claver-Carone. “He could say to anyone who wants to work in Venezuela, I'm the guy. I have the keys. If you want to play ball, invest with me.”

3

The former US official said Claver-Carone was raising capital for his Lara Fund while he served as a special government employee at the State Department. While Bedoya was running the firm, they said Claver-Carone was leveraging his position inside the Trump administration to pitch potential investors.

When Trump appointed Claver-Carone to serve as the

first American president of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 2020, he hired Bedoya as his chief-of-staff. The couple's secret romance at the bank triggered an embarrassing ethics investigation after a hand-written contract was discovered showing they had agreed to pursue “absolute happiness,” and included a clause with punishments including “candle wax and a naughty box” if either party breached the deal [*on what planet is candle wax sexy?*]

An independent probe ordered by the IDB discovered that Claver-Carone had increased his paramour’s salary by 40 percent, a \$133,000 reward in less than a year. Investigators also found that the couple had racked up expenses on an IDB credit card during romantic getaways. Claver-Carone refused to participate in the investigation while accusing its authors of “fabrications.” In the end, IDB governors voted unanimously in favor of his firing. The US government endorsed their decision: “President Claver-Carone's refusal to fully cooperate with the investigation, and his creation of a climate of fear of retaliation among staff and borrowing countries, has forfeited the confidence of the bank’s staff and shareholders and necessitates a change in leadership,” they wrote. . .

. . . Claver-Carone announced he was leaving the State Department to return to his Lara Fund. His departure gave

the appearance that he had been forced out of his job, however, he maintained his clout through his direct line to Rubio. The former US official told The Grayzone that Claver-Carone is now angling to become a Cuban American version of Jared Kushner, the Trump son-in-law who has leveraged his proximity to the president and role as Middle East negotiator to rake in billions from Israel and several Gulf monarchies despite having no official government title. To do so, he has allegedly inserted himself into the byzantine process of restructuring Venezuela's debt.

4

When the Trump administration announced that Venezuela could hire a financial advisor to assist with its sovereign debt, Rodriguez initially planned a public bidding process for the coveted position, but then, Claver-Carone issued support for Centerview, leading to the firm's selection *[Some in the opposition have speculated that Centerview was chosen because one of its partners, Matthieu Pigasse, is a self-described “pro-market socialist” who previously worked on deals with Maduro and Venezuela’s state owned PDVSA oil company].*

In recent weeks, Claver-Carone has attempted to undermine financial advisors who had been working with the Venezuelan government to restructure its debt since

2014. When Claver-Carone's partner, Bedoya, arrived in Caracas in May 2026 on a private jet with Pigasse, she began pushing to remove the advisory mandate from David Syed, a seasoned French lawyer who had advised Caracas on debt-related issues for over a decade, and is considered incorruptible.

The Grayzone wrote “The effort to push [*Syed*] out created a lot of tension. You can't understand debt restructuring by parachuting in without his knowledge.” Syed did not respond to The Grayzone's request for comment. Hamouda Chekir, another Centerview partner who works on Venezuela’s debt, did not respond to calls and text messages sent to his personal phone [*an oil producing country with a huge debt. Only in the Americas*].

Just before leaving the State Department in May 2025, Claver-Carone convinced Rubio not to renew a sanctions waiver that allowed Chevron to sell Venezuelan oil in the US market. In doing so, he eliminated a mechanism which was explicitly designed to promote transparency and prevent local officials from skimming cash.

5

In January, 2026, after abducting Maduro, the Trump administration granted confidential licenses to a pair of

notoriously corrupt trading houses, Vitol [*Dutch, handles about 350 billion tons of oil per year. It is not publicly traded and has done business with [Iran](#) after the sanctions*] and Trafigura [*based in Singapore, world's largest trader in metals and second in oil, \$244 billion in [gross](#) revenue as of 2023*], to export Venezuelan oil. The deal came months after Trump's re-election [campaign](#) received a whopping \$6 million donation from a senior trader at Vitol.

Robert Bachmann, an analyst at the Swiss watchdog Public Eye, told the *Washington Post* at the time: “Trump is taking advantage of firms that know how to circumvent regulation.” Both companies had been caught engaging in a series of elaborate bribery schemes across Latin America and Africa. In 2020, the Department of Justice forced Vitol to pay a \$135 million penalty for bribing officials for licenses in Mexico, Ecuador and Brazil. Trafigura paid a similarly staggering fine in 2024 for a lucrative bribery scheme in Brazil. In the US, Vitol was rung up by the California Attorney General for manipulating spot market prices of oil, but almost as soon as the Trump administration entered office, it neutered the DOJ corrupt foreign practices division charged with enforcing the judgments against Trafigura and Vitol on the grounds that it was “impeding America’s national security objectives” [*just the cost of business, these fines are meaningless to firms of this size*] . . .

Trump, for his part, has essentially admitted Venezuelan oil profits are channeled into a slush fund for his international rampage: “We've taken out so much oil in Venezuela, we've paid for the cost of the war [with Iran] about 25 times over,” the president boasted during a May 23 campaign rally. While the president's claim is absurd, as Venezuela presently exports only about one million barrels of oil a month – hardly enough to cover a full day of warfare – it revealed his avaricious attitude toward the entire operation.