

# WAS BARTERING VENEZUELANS ALWAYS THE PLAN?

Yesterday, 252 Venezuelan men who had been held in CECOT concentration camp were flown to Venezuela. Among the people who survived their detention in El Salvador are Andry José Hernández Romero (the gay stylist), Neri Alvarado Borges (the guy kidnapped because of his autism-solidarity tattoo), and Christian, who came to the US as an unaccompanied minor and should have been protected under a prior agreement. The government including this declaration in the latter docket explaining that Nicolás Maduro has agreed to send back any of the 252 returned men for legal proceedings (though as written that appears to cover only adverse proceedings).

In exchange for the return to Venezuela of those men, Maduro released dozens of political prisoners and 10 US citizens or permanent residents.

The successful prisoner swap comes just ten days after a NYT story describing how *both* Marco Rubio and Ric Grenell were attempting to negotiate that deal, but Grenell fucked it up by offering better (and unapproved) terms than Rubio was offering.

The Trump administration's top diplomat, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, was overseeing a deal to free several Americans and dozens of political prisoners held in Venezuela in exchange for sending home about 250 Venezuelan migrants the United States had deported to El Salvador.

But the deal never happened.

Part of the reason: President Trump's envoy to Venezuela was working on his own deal, one with terms that Venezuela

deemed more attractive. In exchange for American prisoners, he was offering to allow Chevron to continue its oil operations in Venezuela, a vital source of revenue for its authoritarian government.

The discussions, which included the release of about 80 Venezuelan political prisoners, and the two different deals were described by two U.S. officials and two other people who are familiar with the talks and sought anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the issue.

That attempted deal has been public since at least April.

Which raises the question: Was a third-country swap always the plan? Was that part of the reason why Emil Bove ordered a bunch of people at a March 14 meeting that the planes carrying the Venezuelan men – plus some Salvadorans who could implicate Nayib Bukele in ties to MS-13 – must take off, no matter what?

I'll return to this question – it's one I've been puzzling as the Administration goes to ever more extreme lengths to cover up what happened here.

Those 252 men were used as bait.

Was that always the plan?