

MEMORANDUM

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN. *a*

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~

April 27, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *H*

SUBJECT: Situation in Bolivia

All is reported quiet in Bolivia. The Vice President, Luis Siles Salinas, has been sworn in as president. He convoked an emergency meeting of the cabinet, amplified to include the military. The Bolivian armed forces announced in a national radio message to the nation that the military guaranteed the presidential succession in accord with constitutional process. All commands are quiet and as of now the military appears unified, under the command of pro-U.S. Chief of Staff Rogelio Miranda. Their decision to support constitutional processes increases immediate stability and calm. With Barrientos' death the strong figure that will emerge will be Chief of the Armed Forces, General Alfredo Ovando. General Ovando has been in the U.S. on an official visit as guest of General Westmoreland. At the specific request of the Bolivian cabinet and armed forces, he is returning to the U.S. tonight, and is being flown back, at his request, by U.S. Air Force plane. His return is awaited by the military and he is now in control of the military. Ovando very much desires to be Bolivia's next constitutional president, and had planned to launch his candidacy for the 1970 elections. His strong desire to be constitutionally elected will probably lead him to support the constitutional succession of Siles, but he will also most surely be the power behind the throne.

Siles, a member of the Social Democratic Party, a small middle-class business party, is somewhat erratic, neither very pro-U.S. nor very hostile. He is not a strong leader, however, and his weakness may encourage jockeying for power around him. The various political parties are splintered and the armed forces constitute the only cohesive political force. Siles will thus stay in power at the sufferance of the military and specifically of Ovando.

There is, for the moment, no reason to expect any immediate disorders or change of government policy in Bolivia.

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