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## Interior Secretary Francisco Blake Mora Dies in Helicopter Crash

by Carlos Navarro

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In a case of *déjà vu*, an aircraft carrying Mexico's interior secretary crashed near Mexico City, leaving no survivors. On Nov. 4, 2008, an airplane crashed carrying then interior secretary Juan Camilo Mouriño ([SourceMex, Nov. 12, 2008](#)). The scene was repeated just one week after the third anniversary of Mouriño's death. On Nov. 11, 2011, a helicopter carrying Interior Secretary José Francisco Blake Mora also crashed in a fog, killing everyone on board.

A week earlier, Blake Mora had sent out a message on Twitter on the third anniversary of Mouriño's death. Today we remember Juan Camilo Mouriño three years after his death, a person who was working to build a better Mexico," Blake Mora tweeted on Nov. 4.

President Felipe Calderón appointed Blake Mora as interior secretary in July 2010 to replace Fernando Gómez Mont, who left the post following a dispute with the executive and the governing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) regarding electoral strategy ([SourceMex, July 21, 2010](#)). "Mexico has lost a great patriot...and I lost a dear friend," Calderón said in a nationwide address following the incident.

### *Blake Mora is second head of SEGOB to die in three years*

Like the accident that took Mouriño's life, the crash that killed Blake Mora was ruled an accident and not the result of foul play. Still, some observers could not help but wonder if there was a chance of sabotage, since both men died while at the helm of the Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB).

"Regardless of whether it was an accident, several theories have emerged on whether criminal elements participated in the unfortunate incident that killed Blake," columnist Francisco Muro González wrote in *El Sol de Zacatecas*. "Perhaps it was a coincidence, but it does seem strange that...Juan Camilo Mouriño and Francisco Blake Mora—both members of the PAN and both interior secretaries—met the same fate."

In both cases, the death of the person in charge of SEGOB will have little impact on the administration's anti-drug strategy. "Governability will prevail because the administration is led by a strong personality," Muro González pointed out.

Others also wondered out loud whether the two incidents were accidents or whether sabotage might have been involved.

"Any death is regrettable, but these officials had access to privileged information about the campaign against drug traffickers, conversations with world leaders, and knowledge about the radical groups that operate in Mexico," Antonio Rosas Landa wrote on *Univision.com*. "The circumstances surrounding their deaths deserve an answer, not only from an individual standpoint but because of the value that these men had for our nation."

"There are many coincidences because now we have [lost] two interior ministers in one presidential term....Who knows if we'll ever really know what happened," said PAN Deputy Manuel Clouthier of Sinaloa, whose father died in a still-unexplained highway accident in 1989. The elder Clouthier represented the center-right party in the 1988 election won by Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Blake is actually the third high-level Cabinet secretary to lose his life as a passenger in an aircraft that fell near Mexico City. In 2005, a helicopter carrying public safety secretary Ramón Martín Huerta, a member of former President Vicente Fox's Cabinet, crashed into a mountainside in México state in a thick fog ([SourceMex, Oct. 5, 2005](#)).

The circumstances of Blake's accident were similar to those in the Huerta case six years ago, with weather conditions ruled as the principal cause of the accident. Initial investigations indicated the pilot of the aircraft that carried Blake Mora was apparently trying to get around thick, low-lying clouds when the Eurocopter Super Puma went down.

### *No evidence of sabotage*

Communications and Transportation Secretary Dionisio Pérez Jácome speculated that the pilot deviated from his original flight path to find a route with better visibility. He said the pattern of debris, scattered in a linear fashion on a sloping field, suggested the aircraft was flying straight and level when it crashed.

Pérez Jácome emphasized to reporters that there was "no indication" so far to suggest that the crash was anything but accidental. But he said the investigation would continue with the help of experts from the US and France. The US National Transportation Safety Board has confirmed that a team of investigators from the NTSB and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) are being sent to Mexico to assist their Mexican counterparts. Pérez Jácome said he expected the investigation to last several months and maybe as long as a year.

Some critics wondered why these types of accidents have occurred in Mexico with such frequency. Calling the Mexican Air Force "the most dangerous airline in the world," Rosas Landa questioned how aircraft that are meticulously maintained and navigated by expert pilots could simply get lost in a fog and crash. "If these mistakes were common, or acceptable, there would be hundreds of air mishaps daily around the world," said the columnist.

"If you examine the track record of the pilot, Lt. Col. Felipe Bacio Cortés, you can corroborate that he is top-notch in his profession," columnist Claudia Rodríguez wrote in the daily newspaper Vanguardia. "And, according to reports, the helicopter was in very good condition."

But later information suggested that the helicopter might not have been in flying shape. Co-pilot Pedro Ramón Escobar, in a conversation with his brother before the ill-fated flight, raised concerns about the helicopter's mechanical condition. "My brother called me and told me that there was something wrong with the helicopter and that the problems were evident in an earlier flight from Colima," said Hiram Escobar. "How is it possible that on the day of the accident they would decide to use this same helicopter?"

One early rumor suggested that President Calderón was among the passengers in the helicopter, but the administration moved swiftly to dispel such conjecture. "This rumor that the resident of Los Pinos [presidential palace] had died in the accident resulted in a rapid mobilization of rescue forces

and quick action by Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard and México state Gov. Eruviel Ávila," said Rodríguez.

Rodríguez pointed to another coincidence, that the accident occurred on Nov. 11, 2011, giving credence to the superstition associated with the numbers in the date: 11-11-11.

#### Speculation begins on replacement

Blake Mora was traveling to a prosecutors' meeting in Cuernavaca, in neighboring Morelos state, when the helicopter went down in a mountainous area of México state. Several other SEGOB officials also died in the accident, including Felipe Zamora Castro, the deputy secretary for human rights, technical secretary Diana Miriam Heiton Sánchez, and agency spokesperson José Alfredo Medina García.

The death of so many SEGOB officials left a void at the interior ministry and attracted speculation regarding Blake's replacement. The talk centered on Roberto Gil Zuarth, Calderón's personal secretary; Alejandro Poiré, director of the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (CISEN); PAN Sen. Alejandro Zapata Perogordo; former PAN president Luis Felipe Bravo Mena; Labor Secretary Javier Lozano; and Baja California Gov. José Guadalupe Osuna Millán.

Calderón's immediate move was to promote deputy interior secretary Juan Marcos Gutiérrez González to the post, as stipulated by the SEGOB succession rules. Gutiérrez González is expected to hold the post only on an interim basis until Calderón decides on a successor to Blake Mora.

Some analysts suggested that Gil Zuarth would be the most qualified to guide the administration through the end of its term in December 2012. The problem is that Gil Zuarth is involved in the campaign of Josefina Vázquez Mota, who is seeking the PAN nomination for president.

"The interior secretary not only needs to be someone with a good political portfolio but also an individual who is well-versed in matters of public safety," said political columnist Jorge Zepeda Patterson.

Blake Mora, who served as state prosecutor in Baja California, had planned to participate in the gubernatorial elections in August 2013. "He fully intended to become a candidate and made this known to his inner political circle in the state," said Sen. Alejandro González Alcocer, who once served as interim governor in Baja California.

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