

## Motorcycle Gunman Kills 4 At French School

TOULOUSE, France (AP) — A gunman on a motorbike opened fire Monday at a Jewish school, killing a rabbi and his two young sons as they waited for a bus, then chased down a 7-year-old girl, shooting her dead at point-blank range. It was the latest in a series of attacks on minorities that have raised fears of a racist killer on the loose.

Authorities said the same weapon, a powerful .45-caliber handgun, was used in two other recent shootings in southwestern France, also involving an assailant who fled by motorbike. Those attacks left three people dead — military paratroopers of North African and Caribbean origin.

The shootings echoed across a nation that has been focused on an upcoming presidential race in which issues about religious minorities and race have gained prominence. President Nicolas Sarkozy — facing a hard re-election battle — raised the terrorism alert level in the region to its highest level, while also noting a possible racist motive.

"This act is despicable, it cannot go unpunished," Sarkozy said in a prime-time address to the nation. "Each time this man acts, he acts to kill, giving his victims no chance."

## Afghan Killings: Suspect Has Sketchy Memory

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan. (AP) — The lawyer for the Army staff sergeant accused of slaughtering 16 Afghan civilians in a nighttime shooting rampage met his client for the first time Monday and said the soldier has a sketchy memory of the night of the massacre.

Lawyer John Henry Browne said Robert Bales remembers some details from before and after the killings, but very little or nothing from the time the military believes he went on a shooting spree through two Afghan villages.

"He has some memory of some things that happened that night. He has some memories of before the incident and he has some memories of after the incident. In between, very little," Browne told The Associated Press by telephone from Fort Leavenworth, where Bales is being held.

Pressed on whether Bales can remember anything about the shooting, Browne said, "No," but added, "I haven't gotten that far with him yet." In an earlier interview with CBS News, Browne said unequivocally that Bales couldn't remember the shootings.

Bales, 38, has not been charged yet in the March 11 shootings, though charges could come this week. The killings sparked protests in Afghanistan, endangered relations between the two countries and threatened to upend American policy over the decade-old war.

## Violence Rattles Upscale Area Of Syrian Capital

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels battled regime forces Monday in a heavily protected, upscale area of Damascus, activists said, in a sign that the country's outgunned opposition is increasingly turning to insurgent tactics.

At least three people were killed in the firefight, which was the most serious clash in the Syrian capital since the uprising began a year ago. The battle with machine guns and automatic rifles brought the country's violent conflict to the streets of a neighborhood that houses embassies and senior government officials.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a network of activists throughout the country, said 18 government troops were wounded in the fighting and two later were believed to have died.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, who heads the Observatory, described the clash "as the most violent of its kind and closest to security centers in Damascus since the revolution began."

## Officials Warn Schools Must Improve In U.S.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's security and economic prosperity are at risk if America's schools don't improve, warns a task force led by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Joel Klein, the former chancellor of New York City's school system.

The report, obtained by The Associated Press, cautions that far too many schools fail to adequately prepare students. "The dominant power of the 21st century will depend on human capital," it said. "The failure to produce that capital will undermine American security."

The task force said the State Department and U.S. intelligence agencies face critical shortfalls in the number of foreign language speakers, and that fields such as science, defense and aerospace are at particular risk because a shortage of skilled workers is expected to worsen as baby boomers retire.

According to the panel, 75 percent of young adults don't qualify to serve in the military because they are physically unfit, have criminal records or inadequate levels of education. That's in part because 1 in 4 students fails to graduate from high school in four years, and a high school diploma or the equivalent is needed to join the military. But another 30 percent of high school graduates don't do well enough in math, science and English on an aptitude test to serve in the military, the report said.

## President Raises \$45 Million In Donations Last Month

BY KEN THOMAS  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama collected \$45 million for his re-election bid in February, accelerating his fundraising pace as his campaign frets over an oncoming spending blitz by Republican-leaning outside groups.

Obama's monthly haul was nearly twice as much as the \$23 million per month average he raised during the final three months of 2011 and more than the \$29.1 million he raised in January. Yet the largesse still fell short of the \$56 million he raised in February 2008, when he was seeking the Democratic nomination against Hillary Rodham Clinton.

With Republicans locked in an extended primary, Obama's team has tried to build a large 50-state operation that will help it register new voters, bring back past supporters and boost turnout. Obama's campaign had about \$75 million in the bank through the end of January; totals for February were not immediately available.

Campaign officials have implored supporters to donate money and get involved, pointing to Republican-leaning super PACs expected to raise hundreds of millions of dollars to defeat the president. Obama's campaign said earlier this year that it would bless big-money super PACs supporting Democrats as a way of countering the Republican effort.

In an email to donors last week, campaign manager Jim Messina cited a poll showing Obama trailing

Republican Mitt Romney and asked them to get involved.

"We're looking at a race that will be tighter than you think. And the other side has groups ready to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to tear down President Obama," Messina said.

Obama has consistently out-raised his Republican opponents. Romney, who has led the Republican field in fundraising, brought in \$6.5 million in January, about a quarter of what Obama raised that month.

But Obama's totals in February lagged behind what candidate Obama raised four years ago, before he had the benefit of the entire Democratic Party apparatus behind him.

## Decision 2012

# Romney Aims For Illinois KO

BY STEVE PEOPLES AND JIM KUHNHENN  
Associated Press

CHICAGO — His confidence surging, Mitt Romney pointedly ignored his Republican rivals on the eve of Tuesday's high-stakes primary election in Illinois and turned his fire instead on the Democrat he hopes to oust in the fall.

Romney pushed into President Barack Obama's home territory, assailing Obama's economic credentials on the Chicago campus where the president taught for more than a decade.

"Freedom is on the ballot this year," Romney told students and supporters, contending that the nation's recovery from recession was being limited by an "assault on our economic freedom" by Obama. "I am offering a real choice and a very different beginning," he said.

While Republican rival Rick Santorum courted anti-Romney conservatives across Illinois, the front-runner was trying to show he was more than ready to rise above the grinding GOP primary battle and move toward a general election matchup against Obama. Romney has secured more delegates than his opponents combined, and his nomination seems more assured each week as Santorum's shoestring campaign struggles under the weight of continued disorganization.

But a victory in Illinois' Tuesday primary is by no means assured.

Romney has spent big on advertising here, and he will have devoted more than three straight days to the state — an eternity by some standards in this constantly shifting campaign — by the time votes are counted Tuesday night.

After embarrassing Santorum with a one-sided victory in Puerto Rico Sunday, the Romney campaign sees in Illinois a potential breaking point for stubborn rivals who have defiantly vowed to stay in the race until the GOP's national convention in August. Should Santorum and Newt Gingrich stay politically alive until then and follow through on their threat, it could turn the convention into an intra-party fight for the first time since 1976.

Illinois is expected to be far closer than Puerto Rico's blowout, although recent polls suggest Romney may be pulling away. Even if he should lose the popular vote, Romney is poised to win the delegate battle. Santorum cannot win at least 10 of the state's 54 delegates available Tuesday because his campaign



CHRIS WALKER/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT

**Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney greets attendees Monday after an appearance at International House at the University of Chicago.**

didn't file the necessary paperwork

Still, Santorum campaigned hard across the state Sunday and Monday in light of the stakes in Illinois, one of the last premier battlegrounds before the Republican race enters an extended lull after Saturday's contest in Louisiana.

"If we're able to come out of Illinois with a huge or surprise win, I guarantee you, I guarantee you that we will win this nomination," he said.

He rallied conservatives on Monday in Dixon, Ill., the hometown of President Ronald Reagan, saying, "I might add, just parenthetically, that if we just happen to win Illinois, that will be the 11th state that I've won."

He invoked the former president's insurgent campaign in 1976 against President Gerald Ford for the Republican nomination. Reagan lost, but it set the foundation for his return in 1980 when he won the nomination and defeated Democratic President Jimmy Carter.

As Romney focused on the economy in Chicago, Santorum said that the president's health care overhaul, not the economy, is the election's "most salient issue." And he continued to emphasize conservative cultural values: "Ronald Reagan understood that faith plus

family equals freedom in America," Santorum said.

In remarks in Rockford, Ill., Santorum said an oppressive government rather than the economy is the real issue of the presidential campaign.

"At every single speech that I give I talk about Obamacare," he said. "Every single speech I say that the issue in this race is not the economy. The reason the economy is an issue in this race is because we have a government that is oppressing its people and taking away their freedom and the economy is suffering as a result of it."

Romney, meanwhile, campaigned in the city where Obama taught law at the University of Chicago and where the president has his national campaign headquarters. Avoiding any reference to Republican opponents, Romney assailed the president.

"The American economy is fueled by freedom," he said, flanked by a row of American flags. "The Obama administration's assault on our economic freedom is the principal reason why the recovery has been so tepid — and why it couldn't meet their expectations, let alone ours."

# General: U.S. To Stay The Course In Afghanistan

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. must stick to its strategy in Afghanistan, including the planned withdrawal calendar, over the next several months despite recent setbacks that have tested America's relations with the Afghans, the top U.S. commander for the war is telling Congress.

Gen. John Allen is heading to Capitol Hill Tuesday for the first time since the Quran burnings and last week's shooting spree by a U.S. soldier inflamed anti-American sentiment in Afghanistan. The incidents spawned attacks against U.S. forces and prompted Afghan leaders to demand that American troops pull out of local villages and rural areas.

The upheaval has fueled Congressional opposition to the war, insuring that Allen will face lawmakers who are bitterly divided and increasingly skeptical of the administration's strategy.

In frank testimony prepared for delivery to the House Armed Services Committee Tuesday, Allen argues that while the last few months "have been trying," the coalition and its Afghan allies have made progress and degraded the insurgency.

"This campaign has been long.

It has been difficult, and it has been costly. There have been setbacks, to be sure, we're experiencing them now, and there will be more setbacks ahead," Allen says. "I wish I could tell you that this war was simple, and that progress could be easily measured. But that's not the way of counterinsurgencies."

Allen's testimony, which was obtained by The Associated Press, comes at one of the most troubled points in the decade-long conflict, as election politics in America and Afghanistan, coupled with the unpopularity of the war, put unprecedented pressure on U.S. commanders to get troops home.

In recent weeks, U.S.-Afghan relations have been strained by the burning by Qurans and other religious materials at a U.S. military base, followed by the massacre just over a week ago of 16 Afghans, including women and children, allegedly by an American Army soldier. Afghans were further angered when the soldier, Staff Sgt. Robert Bales, was flown out of Afghanistan and taken to Fort Leavenworth's military prison in Kansas.

The Quran burnings sparked a week of riots and retaliatory attacks that left more than 30 people dead, including six U.S. soldiers.

Against that backdrop, Allen will tell Congress that while there is much hard and deadly work ahead, "the progress is real, and, importantly, it's sustainable."

The chairman of the House panel, Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, R-Calif., has pushed for the U.S. to be cautious pulling troops out, so the move won't risk the gains that have been won.

"An insurgent is the toughest kind of opponent a democracy can fight. Rooting them out takes patience," he said last week.

But Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., a top Democrat on the committee, is among those calling for a faster withdrawal.

"It is time to bring our troops home, and, while the president has laid out a responsible path to do so, we should continue to look for every opportunity to accelerate our timeline," Smith wrote in an opinion piece in *USA Today*.

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