

Taliban defectors help Afghans reclaim town

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By Associated Press
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KABUL, Afghanistan

Hundreds of Taliban fighters fled in trucks and motorbikes yesterday as Afghan and NATO troops attacked into the southern town of Musa Qala.

Afghan officers reported some enemy fighters, possibly al-Qaeda, were holding out in the town center. They said the coalition force controlled the town but was moving slowly toward the center because of improvised bombs.

Insurgents had held the town since February. President Hamid Karzai said the assault was aided by some local Taliban leaders switching sides. Some 7,000 British soldiers have faced fierce battles in the hotly contested region of northern Helmand province this year. It is the world's largest opium poppy growing region and provides the Taliban with tens of millions of dollars.

At least 10 Taliban were reported killed yesterday, in addition to more than a dozen killed since fighting intensified Friday.

Karzai said Taliban brutality in Musa Qala played a significant part in leading to the attack.

He said a 15-year-old boy accused of spying by the Taliban was hung from a ceiling and roasted to death by a fire started beneath him. The terrorists then told the boy's mother she could pick up her son.

"When she entered the room she found the charcoaled dead body of her son," Karzai said. "Some of the Afghan Taliban who also witnessed atrocities like that, they came and they met with me and they asked me to intervene and (said) that they will switch sides, and that is what's happened

[Back to Top](#)