



April 2, 2019

Attack Victim Presses U.S. To Suspend Military Sales To Egypt

By Michele Kelemen

More than three years ago, the Egyptian military, using U.S.-made helicopters, mistakenly attacked a group of tourists — killing 12 people and wounding an American woman.

STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

Desert is now complicating U.S. relations with Egypt. The United States sells military hardware to its longtime ally. And the way that that hardware was used could now complicate plans for further sales. More than three years ago, the Egyptian military using American-made equipment, mistakenly attacked a group of tourists, leaving eight Mexicans and four Egyptians dead. There was one American there, too, and NPR's Michele Kelemen has her story.

MICHELE KELEMEN, BYLINE: Californian April Corley has vivid memories of that day in September of 2015. She was traveling with her boyfriend Rafael and a group of Mexican tourists, including Rafael's mother. They had just stopped for lunch in the desert.

APRIL CORLEY: Rafael was playing music on the radio of the car. I was doing cartwheels in the sand, and Rafael was taking my picture. And then I felt something blow me to the ground.

KELEMEN: She says she struggled to get up, saw a huge black ring in the sand. Then, an Apache helicopter came back and started firing again.

CORLEY: I remember a lot of blood and seeing people that I really cared about die all around me.

KELEMEN: At the time, Egyptian authorities said the tourists were in a closed military zone. But Corley says they had been waved through a series of checkpoints. It would be many hours before they were rescued. Rafael, who she calls her soulmate, was killed. She and his mother survived.

CORLEY: I've had a lot of loss in my life. I can't work. All my dreams have been crushed. And then when I think about Rafael's mother and losing your son right in front of you is unbearable

KELEMEN: Corley's body was riddled with shrapnel. She's gone through 10 surgeries, many hours of physical therapy and treatment for PTSD. Her lawyers say she declined \$150,000 offered by Egypt - not enough to even cover her medical evacuation from Egypt home to California.

CORLEY: I have chronic pain. I have limited range of motion, so it makes it very difficult for me to do things like get dressed, brush my teeth, wash my hair.

KELEMEN: The 40-year-old was speaking to NPR in the offices of lawyer Jared Genser, who is trying to raise the profile of this case a week before Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi comes to Washington.

JARED GENSER: We hope President Trump will deliver a very clear message to President Sissi that the United States can't provide any more Boeing Apache helicopters unless April's case has been satisfactorily resolved.

KELEMEN: The U.S. gives Egypt \$1.3 billion a year and, last November, approved the sale of 10 new Apache helicopters. Senator Patrick Leahy and Congresswoman Nita Lowey argued in a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that this would reward Egypt with more of the same lethal equipment that they used to, quote, "recklessly injure an American tourist." Corley's lawyers are seeking \$14 million in compensation. The Egyptian Embassy did not respond to a request for comment.

Corley describes her life before the attack as, quote, "glitter, rhinestones and roller skates." She was the skater and stunt performer working with Madonna and Katy Perry and appearing in a Chet Faker video.

CHET FAKER: (Singing) You got to know, I'm feeling love, made of...

KELEMEN: Wearing a green top with her long brown hair flowing, Corley and two others skate and dance along a dark empty road.

CORLEY: We had so much fun skating down the middle of the street at night in the warm summer air in Los Angeles - all this hard work that we had done training to get to this point to just enjoy ourselves.

KELEMEN: That life, she says, is gone. Now it's all doctors' appointments and pain management.

Michele Kelemen, NPR News, Washington.