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Zyuganov Denies Scandalous Libya Tweet

By Jonathan Earle

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Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov surrounded by party faithful during Victory Day celebrations. **Igor Tabakov**

Communist Party chief Gennady Zyuganov has denied responsibility for a scandalous Twitter post this week that seemed to compare slain U.S. diplomat J. Christopher Stevens to a euthanized dog.

Zyuganov meant to criticize NATO's "meddling" in the Middle East, but aides twisted his words when they wrote that Stevens was "shot like a dog," Zyuganov told RIA-Novosti on Wednesday.

"More than a hundred people heard my comments. But on Twitter, aides evidently condensed it into two or three phrases and distorted the meaning," he said.

But the Communist leader defended the phrase "shot like a dog," which he said was used

figuratively to mean "without mercy or shame."

Earlier, a Zyuganov spokesman appeared to contradict his boss' version of events. Aides transmit Zyuganov's remarks "word for word," Denis Parfyonov said, Kommersant reported Wednesday.

The tweet caused a stir and even talk of official sanctions against Zyuganov when it appeared on his official Twitter feed on Monday.

"The American ambassador to Libya was shot like a dog," the post read. "He was the top expert on the Libyan 'revolution.' He reaped what he sowed."

Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, died of smoke inhalation after an angry mob stormed the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi last week. Contrary to the Twitter post, he was never shot.

Zyuganov stood by the claim that U.S. policy was to blame for Stevens' death.

"America's policy of intervention in these countries is turning against them like a boomerang," Zyuganov said.

A U.S. Embassy spokesman reached by telephone Wednesday declined to comment on the tweet, which he described as an "internal Russian matter."

A Communist Party official close to Zyuganov said he doubted there would be official reprisals.

"One hundred forty characters isn't an official statement on world affairs," Duma Deputy Alexander Yushchenko said by telephone, adding that Zyuganov's official positions were clearly stated elsewhere.

It was not immediately clear how U.S. officials could sanction Zyuganov. Zyuganov doesn't have any bank accounts abroad, he's never held a one-on-one meeting with U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul, and the last time he was in the United States was at least 10 years ago, Yushchenko said.

Three other Americans were killed in the Sept. 11 attack, which was ostensibly sparked by the appearance of a trailer for a low-budget American-made movie that portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a womanizer, pedophile and homosexual.

Violent protests against the movie have erupted throughout the Muslim world, with U.S. diplomatic posts coming under attack in Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia and elsewhere.

Despite the uproar over the tweet, it had not be deleted as of Wednesday afternoon.

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