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A funny thing happened on the way to a joint press conference in Geneva, where the United States, France and Germany issued a joint statement Friday denouncing the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons in an April 4 attack near Damascus that killed hundreds of people. The statement, signed by President Barack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and

French President Francois Hollande, did little to mollify those in the Middle East and beyond who believe the U.S. and its allies were too quick to accept Assad's responsibility and to agree to a political transition in Syria. But the trio gave no indication in their statement that they would consider backing away from their position on the role of chemical weapons in Syria or that they might seek a broader international consensus on the issue. By framing the dispute

in such stark terms — the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime is unacceptable — the statement undercuts a possible political transition and risks isolating the United States, France and Germany, and possibly the rest of Europe, from the rest of the world's nations on the issue. By agreeing to a joint statement with France and Germany, Obama's administration implicitly acknowledged a "red line" for military intervention in Syria. The

U.S. and its allies in the West have said Syria is to blame for the chemical weapons attack near Damascus that killed hundreds of people. But the U.S. — which gave Assad an ultimatum to turn over his chemical weapons arsenal to international control before any punitive action is taken — has made no clear plans to punish Syria for the attack. On the other hand, European allies have suggested military action is possible, albeit not imminent. The

U.S. wants a larger international consensus on the issue as well as a negotiated political solution to the conflict, in which Syrian President Bashar Assad's government is viewed as the principal adversary. But the statement Friday did little to provide new support for a negotiated solution, analysts said. In the absence of a greater sense of unity on Syria, the U.S. has tried to build on its new relationship with Russia as a key ally in the battle against the Islamic State group.

Russia, a longtime ally of Assad's, has also shown little interest in working with the U.S. to end the Syrian conflict. "It's not a good development if we end up accepting that we and the Russians are going to be working in a no man's land where 2d92ce491b