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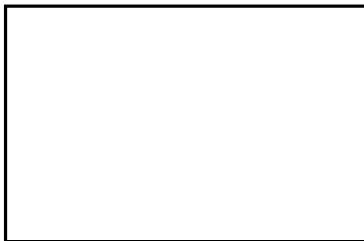
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3. LAO-VIET MINH JOINT STATEMENT IN HANOI

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The joint statement issued by Viet Minh premier Pham Van Dong and Laotian premier Souvanna Phouma on 29 August, during the latter's stopover in Hanoi on his return from Peiping, apparently foreshadows the early establishment of diplomatic relations between Laos and North Vietnam. While the announcement referred only to "the necessity of establishing economic and cultural relations and the exchange of friendly delegations," Souvanna in a later statement explicitly called for "diplomatic ties... in the near future!" The two premiers also advocated strict implementation of the Geneva agreements in Vietnam as well as Laos, thereby changing the previous Laotian position of noninvolvement in the Vietnam problem to support of the Viet Minh in its drive to unify that country.

In return for his favorable pronouncements, the Viet Minh probably gave Souvanna private "assurances" that it would no longer intervene in Laos' internal affairs through its control over the Pathet Lao. Such an agreement is implicit in the joint statement which expressed mutual satisfaction with the Pathet Lao "settlement" and called on Vietnamese and Laotians living in each other's countries to respect local laws and customs.

There are indications that the Laotians will attempt to balance Souvanna's trip by friendly gestures to the West. Souvanna has said that he looks forward to a visit to Saigon. The American embassy comments that the question of real interest at this juncture is the extent to which the premier will retain the support of his colleagues in the government. The embassy points out, however, that Souvanna was not restrained by any opposition he may have encountered within the Laotian delegation, which included Deputy Premier Katay and four other cabinet officers.

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