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Mystery Tiff Estranges LBJ, Russell

By Jack Bell
Associated Press

In the twilight of his White House tenure, President Johnson has cut his communication lines with one of his oldest friends and advisers, Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.)

It has been more than three months since they had a difference of opinion over a matter Russell doesn't even discuss with friends. The usual weekly invitations for the Georgia Senator to drop in for a chat with the President have not been forthcoming.

Except to confirm that there was a disagreement resolved in a way not to his liking, Russell would not comment on the matter.

If the White House follows its customary course it can be expected to deny there is any rift between the President and the Senator and then move to bridge the breach it contends doesn't exist.

This strained relationship—even if it is only temporary—interrupts a close association between the two men that dates back to 1949, when Mr. Johnson first took his seat as a Senator from Texas.

It was Russell who organized the vote that made Mr. Johnson the Democratic Whip. And it was the Georgia Senator who sewed up the commitments for him as Democratic leader when that post became vacant.

For years around the Senate, Mr. Johnson's admonition to colleagues and employes before embarking on any important legislative matter was always: "Check it with Dick first."

As chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Russell has been among the staunchest supporters of Mr. Johnson's Vietnam policies.

He advised against getting involved at the beginning, but when American troops were committed, he supported the President's decisions.

Russell can claim almost [illegible]dit for op[illegible]ration of the [illegible]p New [illegible]rsey in the [illegible]heater. He argued [illegible] unload [illegible]et of [illegible]king Mr. security matters from Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford instead of the White House.

Russell has accepted the situation philosophically and silently. Few of his close friends in the Senate are unaware of the strange twist in his relationship with the President and those who think that it will not endure long.