

ABSTRACT
Cycles of Conflict

“Cycles of conflict” occur when conflict first escalates, then de-escalates, with this pattern possibly repeated again and again. A dynamic model, based on the theory of moves, is used to analyze cyclicity patterns in the 78 2×2 strict ordinal games.

The model distinguishes 42 noncyclic games from 36 cyclic games, which are broken down into three categories: strongly cyclic, moderately cyclic, and weakly cyclic. For each of these categories, the effects of “moving power,” which is the ability to continue moving when the other player must eventually stop, are indicated.

Moving power is shown to be irrelevant in a game postulated to model bombing campaigns waged by the United States against North Vietnam in the latter part of the Vietnam war. However, North Vietnam’s misperception of U.S. preferences made it think that it was playing a different game in which its moving power was effective, which probably prolonged the war. More generally, moving power is not effective in a majority of cyclic games; even those in which it is effective need not result in physical cycling unless there is incomplete information about which player possesses this power.