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# Trends. Zero-Sum Games and Terrorism: Israeli and Palestinian Contestants

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The construct of the zero-sum game has several denotations in the political psychological literature on conflict.

One common denotation is that there are a finite number of assets desired or coveted among those in conflict. The more one gets, the less is available for the other. Another definition is that each contestant has only finite resources to engage in conflict over desired and coveted assets. One loses whatever one uses--unless one wins the conflict and gains back what one has used and, perhaps, even more.

A common response to the former denotation is that conflict is not "really" a zero-sum game wherein one contestant wins to another's losing. Instead, all contestants can win, and the world can concurrently become a more beautiful place. This rarely seems to be a convincing argument--even among its proponents when these proponents are confronted with the loss of desired assets.

A common response to the latter denotation? Again, conflict is not "really" a zero-sum game because resources among all contestants can actually be increased through conflict. One example of this occurs when more people who are represented by contestants and who are previously unengaged in the conflict become engaged reactive to the respective contestants losing people. In fact, the new people who become engaged can more than make up for those who are lost. This is what the Israelis may be engendering, as many people represented by the Palestinians National Authority, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other entities contesting Israel become newly activated to commit or support violence for each of their compatriots lost.

The zero-sum game is bandied about as something that too often is correlated with conflict. Unfortunately, so is its converse. (See Bovasso, G. (1993). Self, group, and public interests motivating racial politics. *Political Psychology*, 14, 3-20; Brinkley, J. (April 2, 2002). In Israel, frantically figuring the results of military force. *The New York Times*, p. A8; Burns, B. D., & Vollmeyer, R. (1998). Modeling the adversary and success in competition. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 75, 711-718; Rapoport, A., & Suleiman, R. (1993). Incremental contribution in step-level public goods games with asymmetric players. *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 55, 171-194.) (Keywords: Israel, Palestine, Terrorism, Zero-Sum Game.)