

Terrorism: A Study in Scarlet

Definitions of Terrorism—Part A
Ole J. Forsberg, Ph.D.
Creighton University

Science is no more a collection of facts than a house is a collection of bricks.

-Jules Henri Poincaré

According to the philosophy of science, two quantities are commensurable if they can be measured in the same (conceptual) units. Commensurability is of great importance in science because it allows things learned about one concept to apply to the other, which allows science to build upon itself. For instance, if I know that microwaves and radio waves are commensurable, and if I know that radio waves are able to travel through a vacuum by varying the electric and the magnetic fields, then I know that microwaves are also able to move through a vacuum by varying the electric and magnetic fields. Commensurability allows us to build on the experiments and findings of others.

Poincaré's above point is that science must build upon itself to be useful. Science is not just a collection of disjointed facts; it is a body of knowledge that fits together to create a greater understanding about reality than merely the sum of its parts. The bases must fit together. They must be examining the same phenomenon. Research on time dilation cannot combine with research on the effects of poverty in a state.

However, it goes farther than this. Not only must the research be examining common concepts, the dependent variables *must be equivalent*. Two research studies on anomie can only be commensurable if the two research teams define anomie equivalently. If not, then the two studies are really examining two different phenomena. Does the extant terrorism build upon itself, or is it merely a collection of related, but incommensurable, relationships? This assignment will help you determine the answer.

The Assignment

Search JSTOR for five (5) quantitative articles that focus on terrorism. For each of those five, reference the article appropriately (see the reference list document online), briefly summarize the article in two paragraphs, and copy the definition of terrorism used.