

Brussels: reporting the horrible truth

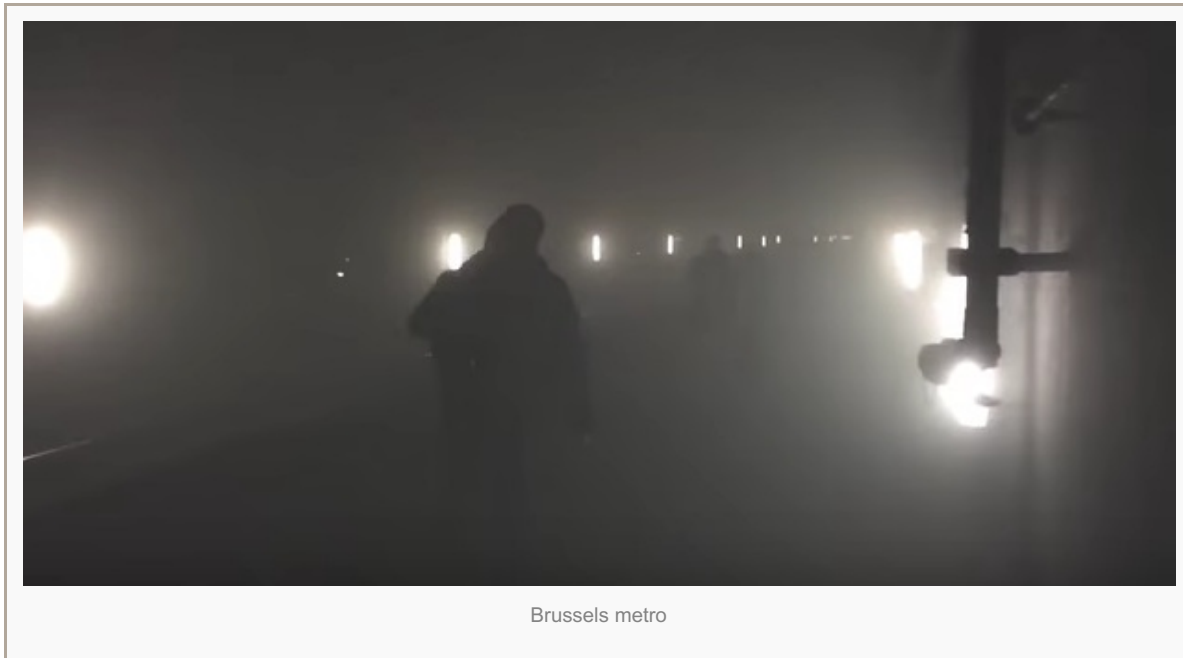
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The horrible truth is that ISIS has got what it wanted today: huge publicity for its cause and a dramatic incursion into the consciousness of western publics and politicians. Paradoxically, it has achieved that thanks to our free media. A news media that has covered the Brussels atrocities in extraordinary full and graphic detail, breaking the news with incredible alacrity and admirable professionalism. And it is our vibrant social networks that have amplified the coverage and brought it intimately to anyone with an Internet connection. So our rich media has rewarded, at least in the short term, the terrorist.

So should we have followed the example of Turkey's Erdoğan who has felt compelled to limit freedom of expression as his country faces multiple terror threats? Of course not. Once you compromise on your liberal values you have lost the war, not just a battle.

It's easy and natural to react emotionally. I personally was deeply moved today by the resonance of the [images of distraught passengers](#) walking from an underground carriage onto half-lit tracks. It took me straight back to the day I programme edited Channel 4 News on the day of the 7/7 bombings.



I've [written at length how journalism must allow for empathy and emotion](#). The human interest of such an awful event must be recognised. But this is not a time for journalists (or anyone else) [to make cheap political points](#) or to indulge in knee-jerk ideological rage.

We're better than that.

There is much that we can do through media to lessen the harm and make more resilient our strategic goals.

It's wonderful to see the expressions of solidarity on social media and the use of networks to offer practical assistance, offering food, shelter and moral support.

It was also impressive to see the verification by mainstream and specialist media outfits filtering out fake imagery and false rumours.

These events are even more impactful now they are amplified by social media. News organisations tell me that they

get extraordinary attention for their live broadcasts and their online coverage at these critical moments. It is vital that once the first shock passes that the context is given in a calm and constructive way. Yes, some of the news will feel unbearable – that’s the reality of what has happened. But by explaining and debating the causes and consequences it can help us sustain the very values that are under attack.

How we do that will be the subject of our annual [Polis conference on April 21st](#).



[Very good article on the same theme here](#) by [@zjtate91](#)

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