

BBC WORLD SERVICE

BBC Arabic

To the Cavling Committee,



We would like to nominate Lasse Skou Andersen and Sebastian Gjerding, of the newspaper Information Dagbladet, for the Cavling prize. They deserve this award because of their tenacious work in exposing how powerful Danish-made surveillance technology has silenced opposition in the Arab world.

This was an imaginative and original story, a ground-breaking approach to a vital issue that affects millions of people in their personal and political lives. Prior to Lasse and Sebastian's work, the corporate and government bodies responsible for these potentially unlawful sales had not been properly challenged.

We witnessed Lasse and Sebastian's efforts first-hand, as we collaborated with them in our BBC documentary "Weapons of Mass Surveillance", released in June this year. Their research was the backbone of our story: they meticulously documented all the sales of mass surveillance technology by BAE Systems.

In order to do this, they used a series of Freedom of Information Act requests for export licences over many months. It was not a straightforward process: while the Danish Business Authority was initially cooperative, a request from BAE to keep the information confidential led to the Danish Business Authority redacting key evidence from the licences.

The Danish team was therefore forced to take a different tack, coordinating with us and the NGO Campaign Against the Arms Trade to make multiple FOIA requests for different information. Through a jigsaw process we were then able to pull together the full picture: the vast scale of sales by BAE of extremely powerful cyber weapons to countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Algeria.

The two journalists relentlessly pursued BAE Systems and the Danish government to hold them to account for these exports. After numerous requests for comment via phone and email were ignored or denied by officials, Lasse went on the road with our film crew to doorstep the Danish BAE headquarters in Aalborg. There was also a memorable encounter with the Minister for Business, Brian Mikkelsen, who the team managed to challenge outside of the Folketing.

Lasse and Sebastian spoke with and documented the cases of those whose privacy was violated by their governments' use of mass surveillance technology: from women's rights campaigners in Saudi Arabia, to human rights defenders in the United Arab Emirates. By explaining the real-life effects of this complex technology, they exposed the risks of selling it

and highlighted the urgent need for an open, democratic debate on the appropriate government response.

Lasse doggedly pursued the Danish Business Minister, who, days after the story was released, committed to reforming the regulation of surveillance exports. Several months after publication, the Danish branch of BAE Systems was closed down. The Danish Business Authority records show that it had just posted its best results in ten years.

While the subject of cyber surveillance can be technical and tough to understand, Lasse and Sebastian's passion for the subject and deftness in storytelling meant the significance of the investigation could not be missed. Indeed, as non-experts, our documentary team learned much from our conversations over the many months it took to produce the film. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and none of us will ever look at a laptop or mobile phone in the same way again.

A final point that must be underlined is the open, collaborative spirit with which Lasse, Sebastian and the editorial team at Information Dagbladet approached the story. Their willingness to share information with us and work as partners, rather than rivals, was incredibly refreshing. This attitude was borne out in their published work, as they shared their investigative methods and evidence with readers. Truly a model of how journalism and principled storytelling should work.

Yours sincerely,



Owen Pinnell

Assistant Producer, Weapons of Mass Surveillance (BBC 2017), on behalf of the team:

Christopher Mitchell, Executive Producer

Elizabeth Jones, Director

Nawal al-Maghafi, Reporter

Rosie Garthwaite, Producer