

Alongside S3 E1: FSO Safer: Race against the clock

00:00:03.140 --> 00:00:09.000

<v SPEAKER_1>The United Nations has begun an operation to defuse what might be the world's largest ticking time bomb.

00:00:10.020 --> 00:00:14.020

<v SPEAKER_2>UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in July 2023.

00:00:14.700 --> 00:00:24.920

<v SPEAKER_1>The ship-to-ship transfer of oil, which has started today, is the critical next step in avoiding an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe on a colossal scale.

00:00:26.200 --> 00:00:36.080

<v SPEAKER_2>He was referring to the ship-to-ship transfer of more than a million barrels of oil from a decaying floating storage and offloading unit, an FSO, off the coast of Yemen.

00:00:37.080 --> 00:00:49.960

<v SPEAKER_1>We need to keep working together over this next critical period to defuse what remains a ticking time bomb and avoid what would be by far the worst oil spill of our era.

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<v SPEAKER_2>By 11 August, the operation to remove the oil from the FSO's SAFA was successfully completed.

00:00:59.220 --> 00:01:06.160

<v SPEAKER_2>The UN-backed operation had been two years in the making and was critical to stopping a major spill in the Red Sea.

00:01:07.000 --> 00:01:16.120

<v SPEAKER_2>Overseeing operations were a team from SMIT Salvage, part of Boskalis, a leading global dredging and offshore contractor and maritime services provider.

00:01:20.660 --> 00:01:31.320

<v SPEAKER_2>On this episode of Alongside, the podcast from NorthStandard for the shipping industry across the world were joined by SMIT's operations manager, Paul Van Toff, and Robert Meijer, manager of projects.

00:01:32.920 --> 00:01:33.900

<v SPEAKER_2>Welcome to both of you.

00:01:34.500 --> 00:01:34.960

<v SPEAKER_3>Thank you.

00:01:35.180 --> 00:01:35.640

<v SPEAKER_4>Thank you.

00:01:35.660 --> 00:01:36.800

<v SPEAKER_4>Thanks for inviting us.

00:01:37.320 --> 00:01:42.100

<v SPEAKER_2>Also with me is Joseph Divis, underwriting director, offshore and renewables at NorthStandard.

00:01:42.360 --> 00:01:43.020

<v SPEAKER_2>Welcome to you.

00:01:43.160 --> 00:01:43.520

<v SPEAKER_5>Thank you.

00:01:43.960 --> 00:01:50.660

<v SPEAKER_2>Joseph, let's begin with you and explain a bit about your relationship with SMIT and how you came to be involved in this project.

00:01:51.020 --> 00:01:51.480

<v SPEAKER_5>Certainly.

00:01:51.500 --> 00:01:51.900

<v SPEAKER_5>Thank you.

00:01:52.280 --> 00:01:57.740

<v SPEAKER_5>I am one of the underwriters in the offshore and renewables sector of the NorthStandard P&I Club.

00:01:57.860 --> 00:02:07.920

<v SPEAKER_5>We ensure about 100 members operating worldwide across both the oil and gas industry as well as alternative energy industries such as offshore wind.

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<v SPEAKER_5>As a team, we use our expertise to support and service our operators who perform a wide variety of activities and operations across those industries.

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<v SPEAKER_5>They do this to very high safety standards, but if something goes wrong, the consequences can be very severe.

00:02:25.860 --> 00:02:29.860

<v SPEAKER_5>We've insured Boskalis for about a decade and SMIT themselves.

00:02:30.340 --> 00:02:35.220

<v SPEAKER_5>We've insured since the 1970s, so we've got a 50 year relationship with SMIT Salvage.

00:02:35.840 --> 00:02:41.100

<v SPEAKER_5>And they're experts in emergency response, wreck removal and salvage operations.

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<v SPEAKER_5>And we make contact with them on a day to day basis, supporting their operations and activities and salvage projects, which are often complex and typically occur in challenging and difficult conditions.

00:02:54.160 --> 00:03:03.160

<v SPEAKER_5>The SAFA project itself came across our desks and centered around the offtake of oil from a tanker, which in itself is a fairly standard operation for SMIT.

00:03:03.560 --> 00:03:09.660

<v SPEAKER_5>But the wider circumstances made this a completely complex and difficult and unique operation.

00:03:09.680 --> 00:03:11.600

<v SPEAKER_2>How do you ever done anything like this before?

00:03:12.180 --> 00:03:22.280

<v SPEAKER_5>We've done similar complex jobs with SMIT, but never really anywhere all these factors combined in such a way to have a potential high consequence spill like this.

00:03:22.720 --> 00:03:29.300

<v SPEAKER_5>So everyone's familiar with the Axon Valdez, which is unfortunately an infamous oil spill.

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<v SPEAKER_5>And for context, the FSO SAFA had four times the amount of oil on board as the Axon Valdez.

00:03:35.880 --> 00:03:39.640

<v SPEAKER_5>So you can imagine what the consequence would be in the event of an incident.

00:03:40.000 --> 00:03:45.160

<v SPEAKER_2>Well, let's talk more about that difficult and unique operation with Paul and Robert.

00:03:45.680 --> 00:03:48.480

<v SPEAKER_2>What experience did you have of similar projects?

00:03:48.580 --> 00:03:51.560

<v SPEAKER_2>And what were some of the challenges that you'd identified along the way?

00:03:52.860 --> 00:03:58.760

<v SPEAKER_3>Yeah, the FSO SAFA was put in Yemen as a storage unit in the 1980s, 1987.

00:03:59.820 --> 00:04:04.520

<v SPEAKER_3>And yeah, it was already decided that this vessel was old and had to be replaced.

00:04:04.520 --> 00:04:06.200

<v SPEAKER_3>And it was just before the war started.

00:04:06.340 --> 00:04:11.040

<v SPEAKER_3>And then the war started and people walked off because they couldn't look after the vessel anymore.

00:04:11.320 --> 00:04:14.980

<v SPEAKER_3>So it became a high concern and it was already on the radar of the United Nations.

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<v SPEAKER_3>And they were working on an attempt to do some repairs that didn't work.

00:04:20.000 --> 00:04:25.400

<v SPEAKER_3>And we thought that repairing this vessel, which was already, let's say, out of class, it may be a technical term.

00:04:25.420 --> 00:04:28.860

<v SPEAKER_3>But if you compare it with cars, it was not under MOT anymore.

00:04:29.140 --> 00:04:31.420

<v SPEAKER_3>So you couldn't use it actually.

00:04:31.440 --> 00:04:33.120

<v SPEAKER_3>And you could also not get it certified.

00:04:33.340 --> 00:04:36.560

<v SPEAKER_3>So we said, well, doing repairs is probably not the way to go.

00:04:36.580 --> 00:04:37.880

<v SPEAKER_3>Plus the vessel is very old.

00:04:38.220 --> 00:04:42.040

<v SPEAKER_3>It's probably safer to move this oil into a shootable vessel.

00:04:42.620 --> 00:04:45.660

<v SPEAKER_2>So many complex situations that you might have to deal with.

00:04:45.680 --> 00:04:50.740

<v SPEAKER_2>But let's pick up on the security aspect of it, as you say, it is a war zone.

00:04:51.600 --> 00:04:54.640

<v SPEAKER_2>And the Houthis carry their own elements of danger.

00:04:54.660 --> 00:04:57.160

<v SPEAKER_2>They're very difficult to try and negotiate with.

00:04:57.180 --> 00:04:58.480

<v SPEAKER_2>You have to tread very carefully.

00:04:58.500 --> 00:05:02.180

<v SPEAKER_2>Just talk to us about that, about the challenge of dealing with all that.

00:05:02.460 --> 00:05:03.440

<v SPEAKER_4>One is the security part.

00:05:03.460 --> 00:05:09.140

<v SPEAKER_4>So we were covered by the UN and they have something called the Deconflicted Zone.

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<v SPEAKER_4>So the areas they mentioned, they arranged with the Houthis and with the coalition from Saudi Arabia, these areas cannot be attacked and then they have to notify all the routes they're taking with all the cars.

00:05:20.140 --> 00:05:25.460

<v SPEAKER_4>So even when we were taken on board with those routes and then we had to, we were planning of course to meet with the Houthis.

00:05:26.160 --> 00:05:30.760

<v SPEAKER_4>That brought a different security situation in there and that wasn't all new to us as well.

00:05:30.760 --> 00:05:33.260

<v SPEAKER_4>But that eventually in the beginning went well.

00:05:34.180 --> 00:05:41.700

<v SPEAKER_3>At what Robert said, especially during the first visit was three days, we gave the presentation three times, but every time to a different audience.

00:05:41.720 --> 00:05:44.340

<v SPEAKER_3>So on day one, we thought, okay, they agree.

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<v SPEAKER_3>And day two, there was another audience and they had different questions and then they might disagree.

00:05:48.860 --> 00:05:50.420

<v SPEAKER_3>And day three, there was another audience.

00:05:50.440 --> 00:05:56.040

<v SPEAKER_3>So we're also a little bit puzzled who is making the decision and who is basically interested in what.

00:05:56.960 --> 00:06:00.720

<v SPEAKER_3>So yeah, it was completely different as what we are normally used to.

00:06:01.440 --> 00:06:06.980

<v SPEAKER_2>It was a multi-agency project, as you said, overseen by the United Nations.

00:06:07.300 --> 00:06:11.700

<v SPEAKER_2>But any other aspects that made it a challenge having to deal with multiple agencies?

00:06:12.480 --> 00:06:24.260

<v SPEAKER_3>Well, I think that the United Nations need to have agreement from North, Houthis, and the South, the original government, the IRG, International Recognised Government.

00:06:24.800 --> 00:06:31.100

<v SPEAKER_3>So when we were having discussions in the North to convince the Houthis about this plan, we still need to have approval from the South.

00:06:31.340 --> 00:06:47.120

<v SPEAKER_3>So at the last visit we did before the execution of the operation, we had to go both North and South and try to convince everyone about the plan and the difficulties which we expected in order to explain to them that this is of course not a walk in the park.

00:06:47.560 --> 00:06:50.340

<v SPEAKER_3>You will definitely run because we couldn't inspect the vessel.

00:06:50.760 --> 00:07:09.940

<v SPEAKER_3>So normally you do a proper inspection and you know we're up to, but now we had to work on assumptions and on our experience and we had to work, let's say, a plan with sufficient contingencies, which we did, but then we had to discuss all those uncertainties with various parties and try to get them on board and get approval for this.

00:07:10.740 --> 00:07:18.940

<v SPEAKER_2>So looking at the time frame, you were involved for a few years in this project, putting forward your idea and then bringing everyone on board.

00:07:19.520 --> 00:07:20.860

<v SPEAKER_2>When did it get greenlit?

00:07:20.880 --> 00:07:26.340

<v SPEAKER_2>So from the time that it got greenlit to the time that you carried out the operation, how many months or weeks was that?

00:07:27.080 --> 00:07:29.040

<v SPEAKER_4>I would say we still had about a year plus.

00:07:29.400 --> 00:07:38.080

<v SPEAKER_4>So when the moment it was decided that the UN was going to execute this plan that we brought in, then they pushed forward the UNEP to contractually pick it up.

00:07:38.600 --> 00:07:47.000

<v SPEAKER_4>That was on the one side, but we had been mostly working with UNRC and we had to deal with these different agencies who approached this project from a different side.

00:07:47.760 --> 00:07:49.900

<v SPEAKER_4>So you mentioned it was greenlit.

00:07:50.540 --> 00:07:51.400

<v SPEAKER_4>The plan was greenlit.

00:07:51.420 --> 00:07:58.560

<v SPEAKER_4>Then they had to simultaneously get the funds in and start working on the plan while later on start working on the contract.

00:07:58.980 --> 00:08:00.640

<v SPEAKER_5>And there was a weather window as well, wasn't there?

00:08:01.180 --> 00:08:06.500

<v SPEAKER_3>Yeah, although that was not officially communicated and we do have our own assessments.

00:08:06.660 --> 00:08:15.540

<v SPEAKER_3>For us, it seems that the winter months were really problematic, so January, February, but locally they said you have to get out before September.

00:08:16.100 --> 00:08:19.660

<v SPEAKER_2>Not that much time when you consider how many agencies needed to sign off.

00:08:19.680 --> 00:08:24.520

<v SPEAKER_2>You needed to get the kind of practicality of the operation sorted out as well.

00:08:24.580 --> 00:08:31.940

<v SPEAKER_2>What your movements were going to be and how you're going to deal with the operation once you were on board the tanker.

00:08:32.180 --> 00:08:32.960

<v SPEAKER_2>Fascinating.

00:08:33.020 --> 00:08:37.240

<v SPEAKER_2>Okay, Joseph, I'm going to bring you in again here from a NorthStandard point of view.

00:08:37.480 --> 00:08:41.260

<v SPEAKER_2>What was your role in the build up to this project?

00:08:42.320 --> 00:08:49.920

<v SPEAKER_5>Our primary aim was to give certainty of cover to SMIT Salvage, to enable them to carry out their operations as required.

00:08:50.220 --> 00:09:01.620

<v SPEAKER_5>We obviously, if there was going to be an incident, we were going to be the ones paying out claims, so it was really critical for us to understand as much as we could the operations and the risks being assumed.

00:09:02.040 --> 00:09:07.920

<v SPEAKER_5>Getting all that information, looking at it and reviewing it and collaborating with our various stakeholders took a lot of time.

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<v SPEAKER_5>I think we had to liaise with the international group, our pooling partners and our reinsurers to ensure that they were happy.

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<v SPEAKER_5>We also engaged ABL as a third party verification company to look at the more critical aspects of the operation.

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<v SPEAKER_2>Shall we get back to the operation, because I'm dying to ask you some more questions about it Paul and Robert.

00:09:27.320 --> 00:09:34.660

<v SPEAKER_2>So when you knew that the green light was given, you've taken us, I suppose, up to the point where you're getting on the plane to go.

00:09:35.360 --> 00:09:53.140

<v SPEAKER_2>But whilst all those late night negotiations, discussions, getting sign off from different agencies, whilst all that's going on, did you take a moment to think about personally how worried you were, as an individual, heading into a war zone for what was a really risky operation?

00:09:53.940 --> 00:09:54.420

<v SPEAKER_4>Many times.

00:09:54.440 --> 00:10:00.720

<v SPEAKER_4>It starts already with, I mean, we felt more comfortable with getting the support from the various agencies.

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<v SPEAKER_4>And again, they were so actively involved, the other, I remember the UK and the Dutch government so actively involved that they really wanted to make this happen, so you felt supported.

00:10:09.960 --> 00:10:16.920

<v SPEAKER_4>But you also have your private situation to think of, you have insurances to think of, and then you have to get a good feeling from Boskalis that they are there with you.

00:10:17.440 --> 00:10:32.000

<v SPEAKER_3>I think also, I mean, from Boskalis, the CEO personally got in contact with the CEO of the United Nations, if you call it, for this project, and they made on a personal level an agreement that they would look after our safety.

00:10:32.220 --> 00:10:38.160

<v SPEAKER_3>So we knew at least that we had that support as well, which was important because you go in an unexplored area.

00:10:38.680 --> 00:10:42.960

<v SPEAKER_3>Even although you have been there a couple of times, when you really start to execute it, it is different.

00:10:43.400 --> 00:10:52.680

<v SPEAKER_3>For us, what was important, if we could just assist with preventing an enormous potential environmental disaster, we thought, okay, we can do anything.

00:10:52.860 --> 00:10:58.940

<v SPEAKER_3>Well, then we also have to accept the other side, which is probably that we move into an unexplored area.

00:10:59.880 --> 00:11:06.620

<v SPEAKER_3>I can say from a personal level that I didn't feel unsafe there during the first, let's say, visits.

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<v SPEAKER_3>During the operation, we had some moments, but during the first visits, people treated us, well, basically normal.

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<v SPEAKER_3>We didn't feel that they were hostile against us, not at all.

00:11:17.600 --> 00:11:24.740

<v SPEAKER_3>But we fully realized that initially it was the two of us went there a couple of times to prepare this project.

00:11:25.100 --> 00:11:34.180

<v SPEAKER_3>But the moment we would start the operation, we would have over 100 people, including the Marine crew, in country, and we had to work on a solution.

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<v SPEAKER_3>So we had many, many talks with the United Nations.

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<v SPEAKER_3>And I think it's important to mention that without the United Nations, we couldn't have done this job.

00:11:41.120 --> 00:11:55.640

<v SPEAKER_3>I mean, we at the end worked for them and they were talking with the Houthis and they made all the deals with the Houthis also about our personal security and a safety back out plan if things would go wrong or different.

00:11:56.140 --> 00:11:59.180

<v SPEAKER_3>So that was important, but it took a long time for us to set it up.

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<v SPEAKER_3>And we also worked with a company called Control Risk.

00:12:02.860 --> 00:12:10.740

<v SPEAKER_3>They do the threat assessment, they make a risk analysis, and at the end, they come up with, let's say, the proper mitigation strategy, and that was taken on board by the United Nations.

00:12:11.080 --> 00:12:13.900

<v SPEAKER_2>Can I take you back to your first meeting with the Houthis?

00:12:14.180 --> 00:12:24.600

<v SPEAKER_2>Just take me to that moment, because there must have been, you know, despite the fact that you're in, you know, business mode, you're here for a reason, there must have been a moment there where you thought, hang on, hang on a minute.

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<v SPEAKER_3>We went into a compound that was not the UN compound, it was a compound, let's say, locally.

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<v SPEAKER_3>And the people who were there, some of them we knew up front, and at a certain point, the Houthis came in, but also with their personal protections.

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<v SPEAKER_3>Yeah, but they were all carrying serious guns, and not one, more than one.

00:12:43.140 --> 00:12:51.740

<v SPEAKER_3>And basically, if you Google Yemen and you see all those pictures of the people, well, basically those people came in that room with the same impression in their face.

00:12:52.300 --> 00:12:55.020

<v SPEAKER_3>So initially, yeah, we thought, okay, where are we?

00:12:56.040 --> 00:13:01.060

<v SPEAKER_3>But yeah, that quite quickly turned around and there were normal talks.

00:13:01.100 --> 00:13:04.100

<v SPEAKER_3>And as I said, we didn't feel threatened, hostile by them.

00:13:04.680 --> 00:13:14.300

<v SPEAKER_4>But we had a local party that was also involved with this one and they set up these dinners, of course, on the floor and everybody sitting around it, then you would be joining lunch with the Houthis.

00:13:14.620 --> 00:13:16.340

<v SPEAKER_4>And that really broke a lot of eyes as well.

00:13:16.800 --> 00:13:24.080

<v SPEAKER_4>And we kept doing that because the trust needed to be built and also to know that we're all here and it's together, together with the UN and everybody involved.

00:13:24.560 --> 00:13:29.180

<v SPEAKER_2>Talk us through the technical process then of getting the actual operation underway.

00:13:29.980 --> 00:13:33.580

<v SPEAKER_3>Yeah, so on the technical side, as said, we were not able to do an inspection.

00:13:33.680 --> 00:13:37.160

<v SPEAKER_3>So a lot has to be based on our experience and on assumptions.

00:13:37.560 --> 00:13:39.820

<v SPEAKER_3>Of course, yeah, safety was paramount.

00:13:39.940 --> 00:13:46.280

<v SPEAKER_3>Also because we know that if things would go wrong, Joseph next to me would not be extremely happy and we would not be happy either.

00:13:46.900 --> 00:13:52.580

<v SPEAKER_3>So and yeah, of course, it's our reputation and we were there to prevent an environmental disaster and not to create one.

00:13:53.160 --> 00:13:55.620

<v SPEAKER_3>So we first said, OK, safety of the vessel.

00:13:55.760 --> 00:13:59.520

<v SPEAKER_3>We first have to make the vessel safe, make sure that there is a safe tank environment.

00:14:00.180 --> 00:14:04.140

<v SPEAKER_3>But we also knew, yeah, it's an old hull and we couldn't do any measurements before we were there.

00:14:04.140 --> 00:14:14.820

<v SPEAKER_3>So without becoming too technical, we did all kinds of structural failure engineering to see, OK, can we build those two vessels alongside each other?

00:14:14.840 --> 00:14:19.520

<v SPEAKER_3>So the other tanker where we had to take the oil to had to come alongside the old suffer.

00:14:20.300 --> 00:14:25.880

<v SPEAKER_3>And we were working in the Netherlands with simulator institutes to simulate the mooring operation.

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<v SPEAKER_3>So the mooring master had done the operation already many times on the simulator just to make sure that all the forces would stay within acceptable levels.

00:14:34.060 --> 00:14:38.280

<v SPEAKER_3>And that's also what we discussed then with ABL, who was there on behalf of NorthStandard.

00:14:38.560 --> 00:14:40.320

<v SPEAKER_3>So this and this and this has been done.

00:14:40.520 --> 00:14:42.140

<v SPEAKER_3>So that gave us quite some comfort.

00:14:42.160 --> 00:14:50.140

<v SPEAKER_3>And when we were there, we said, OK, we now do some measurements and then we're going to check with the assumptions based in, have we put in our engineering if this is all correct.

00:14:50.680 --> 00:14:52.140

<v SPEAKER_3>And that was the case.

00:14:52.160 --> 00:14:55.660

<v SPEAKER_3>So we knew up front that what we had designed would work.

00:14:55.980 --> 00:15:05.620

<v SPEAKER_2>When we come to the different elements involved in the operation, how many people, how many vessels in total, how did you operationally undertake the actual transfer?

00:15:06.120 --> 00:15:10.140

<v SPEAKER_3>The main asset was the tanker, which was bought by the United Nations.

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<v SPEAKER_3>Initially we thought that we could just transfer it to a tanker and the tanker can take off the oil and go.

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<v SPEAKER_3>But the Houthis were quite clear the oil should stay and the tanker should also stay.

00:15:18.360 --> 00:15:20.440

<v SPEAKER_3>So the Houthis wanted to have a tanker.

00:15:21.080 --> 00:15:24.380

<v SPEAKER_3>So this was the key asset and that was bought by the United Nations.

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<v SPEAKER_3>We came in with a work vessel where we had our crew and our pumps and all our equipment.

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<v SPEAKER_3>And the operation was furthermore supported by two tugboats for the mooring operation of that tanker which the UN bought.

00:15:35.860 --> 00:15:38.960

<v SPEAKER_3>But overall we had more than 100 people on site.

00:15:39.100 --> 00:15:45.520

<v SPEAKER_4>And then we had a crew for a supply vessel running from Djibouti to site for crew changes and anything we were still missing.

00:15:47.260 --> 00:15:52.760

<v SPEAKER_4>I believe it was coming in almost every other day, every other three days, and that had to be cleared and it was a whole process by itself.

00:15:53.400 --> 00:15:59.420

<v SPEAKER_4>But generally we had in the field we had three of our own vessels next to the sufferer and the new tanker.

00:15:59.500 --> 00:16:00.560

<v SPEAKER_2>And how long did it take?

00:16:01.200 --> 00:16:02.720

<v SPEAKER_4>So we had split it in three operations.

00:16:02.740 --> 00:16:08.140

<v SPEAKER_4>So as I mentioned before, we had two weeks plus for making the vessel safe to go on board.

00:16:08.380 --> 00:16:11.860

<v SPEAKER_4>Then we had the actual STS of the pumping operation 24-7 on that one.

00:16:12.160 --> 00:16:13.580

<v SPEAKER_4>And then afterwards we had the tank washing.

00:16:15.580 --> 00:16:18.520

<v SPEAKER_4>This was all very much also dependent on the tanker arriving.

00:16:18.540 --> 00:16:25.660

<v SPEAKER_4>So all happened on the same time, because obviously the whole project in itself kind of kickstarted with the UNDP purchasing the vessel to replace the sufferer.

00:16:26.220 --> 00:16:31.360

<v SPEAKER_4>And that also got us on a time limit that we had to mobilize by certain time to be in field at the right time.

00:16:31.960 --> 00:16:38.980

<v SPEAKER_4>So all this had to come together and in the end, there were some issues with the registration of the vessel, which were a few days of delay.

00:16:39.940 --> 00:16:44.220

<v SPEAKER_4>But generally, we stuck within the time that we had, which was about 40 days.

00:16:44.880 --> 00:16:47.380

<v SPEAKER_2>What were the Houthis doing during all this?

00:16:47.400 --> 00:16:49.240

<v SPEAKER_2>Were they looking over you?

00:16:49.260 --> 00:16:50.700

<v SPEAKER_2>Were they there?

00:16:50.820 --> 00:16:51.740

<v SPEAKER_2>I mean, how did that work?

00:16:51.760 --> 00:16:55.600

<v SPEAKER_4>Well, that's where also Paul and I came in because we were based in Hodeida.

00:16:55.740 --> 00:17:03.560

<v SPEAKER_4>And for one, start off, most meetings we had over the last three years, actually the whole operation took, were based in Sana'a.

00:17:03.800 --> 00:17:05.920

<v SPEAKER_4>So we kept meeting the authorities there in the UN.

00:17:06.420 --> 00:17:09.240

<v SPEAKER_4>Eventually, we also moved to Aden because of the southern government.

00:17:09.740 --> 00:17:12.040

<v SPEAKER_4>And the operation itself was run from Hodeida.

00:17:12.160 --> 00:17:14.300

<v SPEAKER_4>Now, that was another seven hours drive from Sana'a.

00:17:14.320 --> 00:17:17.000

<v SPEAKER_4>There's hardly any connection there with any flights.

00:17:17.460 --> 00:17:20.580

<v SPEAKER_4>So we were based in Hodeida, overseeing the operation.

00:17:20.780 --> 00:17:22.800

<v SPEAKER_4>You asked me where were the Houthis in this one.

00:17:23.060 --> 00:17:29.100

<v SPEAKER_4>They have a software technical committee, and part of them were placed also in Hodeida.

00:17:29.120 --> 00:17:32.520

<v SPEAKER_4>So we met daily with them to talk about the operation.

00:17:32.920 --> 00:17:39.020

<v SPEAKER_4>We met daily with several UN agencies, and we met with the Houthi software committee to keep them updated.

00:17:39.540 --> 00:17:44.580

<v SPEAKER_2>Any other surprises along the way, or things that you weren't expecting that happened during the operation?

00:17:45.400 --> 00:17:56.800

<v SPEAKER_3>Well, I think that although we at the end got everything achieved, what we want to achieve, and as we mentioned, the first two years, we were trying to build the trust with the Houthis, which worked out quite well.

00:17:57.500 --> 00:18:03.700

<v SPEAKER_3>Once we were executing the operation, you could definitely see that there was not a lot of trust towards what we or the United Nations were doing.

00:18:04.740 --> 00:18:18.820

<v SPEAKER_3>So every time we wanted to do something on site, we noticed that the communication gap between Sanha, where the centre part of Houthi leadership was, and O'Dyda, what Robert mentioned, where the Suffolk Committee was and the work site, that was not there.

00:18:19.480 --> 00:18:29.320

<v SPEAKER_3>So for simple things like taking a boat out to do some draft readings, basically measure outside the ship, how deep sea is in the water, that already created a lot of confusion.

00:18:30.200 --> 00:18:36.460

<v SPEAKER_3>So they always were extremely suspicious and for them, of course, it's not a daily operation.

00:18:36.760 --> 00:18:42.040

<v SPEAKER_3>And so that created a lot of, let's say, sometimes difficult moments.

00:18:42.400 --> 00:18:45.580

<v SPEAKER_2>One of the key takeaways for you, the key lesson of this, Paul?

00:18:45.980 --> 00:18:50.020

<v SPEAKER_3>Well, I think at the end, of course, we are extremely proud that we're able to achieve it.

00:18:50.060 --> 00:18:58.000

<v SPEAKER_3>And this environmental threat was mitigated, but it has been, let's say, a very long and difficult road to get there.

00:18:58.300 --> 00:19:00.160

<v SPEAKER_3>And it was also not easy to execute it.

00:19:00.180 --> 00:19:06.420

<v SPEAKER_3>So I think that we were happy that everyone got out safe and that it was solved.

00:19:07.060 --> 00:19:08.740

<v SPEAKER_3>So it was a big relief for us.

00:19:09.260 --> 00:19:10.580

<v SPEAKER_3>Okay, guys, it's over now.

00:19:10.700 --> 00:19:14.460

<v SPEAKER_4>There were so many times during the whole three years, Paul and I were in the thick of it.

00:19:14.680 --> 00:19:17.600

<v SPEAKER_4>And there were many times that we didn't even see it happening.

00:19:17.960 --> 00:19:21.140

<v SPEAKER_4>There were so many different parties that had to work together to get this happening.

00:19:21.720 --> 00:19:32.100

<v SPEAKER_4>And I still remember that by the end of 2022, when we were doing the tendering, and we still didn't know exactly where we stood with the UN, it was always, in our business, it's much more clearer where you stand with this part.

00:19:32.420 --> 00:19:35.020

<v SPEAKER_4>And when we got to the contracting, and that was a whole different experience.

00:19:35.460 --> 00:19:39.580

<v SPEAKER_4>But eventually, specifically when you saw the vessel moving, which was in April, that was a good point.

00:19:40.240 --> 00:19:41.000

<v SPEAKER_4>You're gonna see it.

00:19:41.020 --> 00:19:44.080

<v SPEAKER_4>And I think eventually, when we were allowed to leave the country.

00:19:44.860 --> 00:19:46.600

<v SPEAKER_2>Not one for a field trip then, Joseph.

00:19:46.640 --> 00:19:47.960

<v SPEAKER_2>I think we can safely say.

00:19:48.380 --> 00:19:52.320

<v SPEAKER_2>From your point of view, what lessons did you learn from the operation?

00:19:52.880 --> 00:19:55.960

<v SPEAKER_5>It shows actually there's so much expertise in the maritime industry.

00:19:56.260 --> 00:20:08.520

<v SPEAKER_5>And obviously having collaborative and transparent relationships with our members and operators and between parties to sort of work towards a common goal is really should be encouraged.

00:20:08.940 --> 00:20:17.560

<v SPEAKER_5>I think the industry could maybe be a lot more proactive rather than reactive and try and not have a similar situation to the FSO SAFA arise in the future.

00:20:17.780 --> 00:20:22.180

<v SPEAKER_5>But I think, yeah, mainly it shows, when teams collaborate, what good can come out of it.

00:20:22.500 --> 00:20:26.800

<v SPEAKER_5>I think this is a really good news story in an era where there's a lot of bad news about.

00:20:26.820 --> 00:20:29.020

<v SPEAKER_5>So I think it's definitely one that should be talked about.

00:20:29.500 --> 00:20:30.300

<v SPEAKER_2>Of course it is.

00:20:30.360 --> 00:20:31.100

<v SPEAKER_2>Of course it is.

00:20:31.120 --> 00:20:34.780

<v SPEAKER_2>I mean, it's been utterly fascinating to hear about it.

00:20:34.800 --> 00:20:54.940

<v SPEAKER_2>Weighing up risk for having to make sure that you're both safe, that the operation goes smoothly, working in an area of conflict, working with a group of people like the Houthis off the coast of Yemen, working with a ship with more than a million barrels of oil, a ship that's decaying.

00:20:56.320 --> 00:20:57.460

<v SPEAKER_2>Absolutely fascinating.

00:20:57.480 --> 00:21:06.860

<v SPEAKER_2>I've really enjoyed hearing about the story and I've no idea whether it will be a once in a lifetime experience or not, but it's been so fascinating to hear about it.

00:21:07.380 --> 00:21:09.320

<v SPEAKER_2>Thank you so much for joining us.

00:21:09.500 --> 00:21:15.160

<v SPEAKER_2>Paul Van Toff and Robert Meijer from SMIT Salvage and Joseph Divis from NorthStandard, thank you.

00:21:15.420 --> 00:21:25.440

<v SPEAKER_2>Well, for more on the security situation in the Red Sea, you can listen to our Alongside future thinking episode with John Thompson from Ambry, where he discusses the emerging and changing threats to shipping.

00:21:25.780 --> 00:21:27.080

<v SPEAKER_2>For now, that's all from us.

00:21:27.200 --> 00:21:34.140

<v SPEAKER_2>Join us next time on Alongside, where we continue to explore key topics affecting the maritime industry and those who are part of it.

00:21:34.460 --> 00:21:37.640

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00:21:38.020 --> 00:21:39.580

<v SPEAKER_2>Thanks again to all of our guests.

00:21:39.700 --> 00:21:41.580

<v SPEAKER_2>From me, Kait Borsay, thanks for listening.