However, two realities limit OPEC's ability to control oil prices. First, OPEC cannot control all of the world's oil sales because its members export less than half of the world's crude oil. The rest of the crude oil comes from non-OPEC countries such as Russia and Mexico. Second, even OPEC members don't always act as a united group. For example, sometimes some members refuse to follow OPEC decisions on how much oil to sell.

Oil-Importing Countries: Working to Protect the Flow of Oil

Other countries depend on the flow of oil from Southwest Asia to fuel their economies. The United States, Japan, and many countries in Europe are huge oil importers and therefore have a strong interest in protecting the flow of oil around the world.

As you have read, in 1990 Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, ordered his military to invade neighboring Kuwait. This invasion gave Saddam Hussein control of Kuwait's oil fields. Fears grew that the dictator would target Saudi Arabia next. If Iraq took over Saudi Arabia, Saddam would control much of the world's oil supply. If he then decided to cut off oil sales, many oil-importing countries would suffer severe energy shortages.

The United States and many other countries formed a coalition, or alliance, to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. Some members of the coalition were oil-importing countries that did not want their oil supplies threatened by Iraq. Others were oil-exporting countries that feared losing control of their oil reserves to Iraq.

The coalition went to war in 1991 to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. The Persian Gulf War lasted just a few weeks. In that time, Kuwait was freed from Iraqi control. The coalition victory sent the world a clear message: as long as oil is the world's main source of energy, countries that import oil will work to keep it flowing.

24.6 Beginning to Think Globally

In this chapter, you learned that crude oil forms deep within Earth. Much of Earth's oil lies under Southwest Asia. However, oil reserves are not distributed evenly among the region's countries, nor is the wealth from oil sales distributed evenly among the citizens of oil-rich countries.

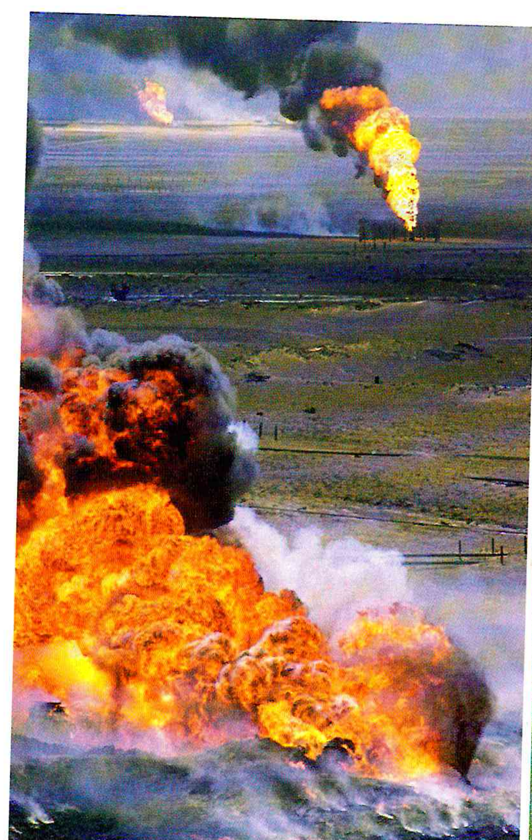
You also learned that oil is a nonrenewable resource. Eventually, the world will run out of oil. Some countries are already developing their renewable resources to meet some of their energy needs. One example is solar energy, which is energy from the sun that can be converted into heat or electricity. As oil runs out, other countries will have to follow their example. Think about this as you examine the map of solar energy in the next section.

Top Contributors to Persian Gulf War Costs

Country
United States
Saudi Arabia
Kuwait
United Arab Emirates
Japan
Germany
United Kingdom
South Korea

Sharing the Cost of War

Many countries shared the costs of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. About two thirds of the money came from oil-exporting countries. They wanted to protect their oil reserves. The rest came from oil-importing countries. They wanted to protect the flow of oil into their countries.



Oil Fields in Flames

Oil is so valuable that countries have gone to war over it. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait to get control of Kuwait's oil reserves. A coalition of countries drove Iraq's forces out of Kuwait. But they were not able to prevent Iraqi soldiers from setting more than 730 oil wells in Kuwait on fire. It took eight months to put out these raging fires.