



## Earth's Resources

**GOVERNMENT**

### Dividing Resources

*In 1990 Iraq's army invaded the neighboring nation of Kuwait and attempted to annex it. This event led the United Nations peacekeeping forces to free Kuwait in the Persian Gulf War of 1991. This reading explores the geography-related causes of that conflict and discusses the problems that can arise when human-made boundaries divide Earth's resources.*

International political boundaries . . . are not merely lines in the sand, on the ground, or anywhere else, for that matter. True, they appear on atlas maps as lines, but that's because . . . maps are two-dimensional. Boundaries must do much more than mark off . . . territories on the surface. Boundaries also divide what's below the surface and even what's above it. In fact, boundaries are . . . imaginary curtains that separate airspace above the ground and resources below it. . . .

It is one thing to mark a boundary on the surface, but it's quite another to locate it deep below the ground. Take a look at the Dutch province of Limburg. . . . Limburg is a narrow corridor of a province, wedged between Germany to the east and Belgium to the west. Underneath lie rich coal seams that extend from Belgium through Limburg into Germany.

The Dutch mined these coalfields vigorously. They got down to the seam, and then excavated [tunneled] it eastward. It wasn't long before they were mining coal below Germany's terrain, but of course there was nothing down there to tell the miners that they were crossing the German border. And the Germans had no way of stopping the Dutch underground; they were mining the same seams, but elsewhere. Soon there was some industrial espionage [spying], the Germans got hold of a map of the layout of the Dutch coal mines and claimed violations of their boundary. A pretty good quarrel followed, and the Dutch agreed to stop mining eastward—but only after they had secured a substantial piece of the German reserve.

Things can get even more complicated when it comes to oil and natural gas. Many oil fields and gas reserves extend from one country to another beneath their common boundary. So it was, in fact, where Iraq and Kuwait meet: the Rumailah Oil Field extends from northern Kuwait into southern Iraq. Here's the problem: when one of the neighboring countries starts to draw on such a joint reserve, oil or gas will flow from the subsurface of the [nondriller] to that of the [driller]. The Iraqis accused the Kuwaitis of drilling oblique [angled] wells, so that the pipes standing in Kuwait actually fed on oil below Iraq; the charge was never proven. But without doubt, oil flowed below the surface from Iraq toward Kuwait, which drilled much more vigorously into the Rumailah Oil Field. After the Gulf War, the United Nations redrew the boundary between Kuwait and Iraq, putting all of the Rumailah reserve within Kuwait and preventing, so it hoped, a future conflict over this resource.

The Germans and the Dutch also were at it again over natural gas. A substantial gas reserve straddles the border between the Dutch northern province of Drenthe and adjacent [neighboring] Germany. Massive Dutch exploration of this underground balloon of gas led to German complaints—but how could the loss to Germany be quantified [measured]? Contentious [quarrelsome] boundary issues, obviously, are not confined to the surface.

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**Understanding What You Read** After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. In what way did Dutch coal miners violate the national territory of Germany?

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2. Do you agree with the author’s view that the Dutch miners had seized part of Germany? Explain why or why not.

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3. How were Earth’s resources a cause of the Persian Gulf War?

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4. What dispute might arise between two neighboring countries over air resources?

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**Activity**

Prepare a diagram showing a reason that two countries might come into conflict over water resources.