

# Javad Oji: Islamic Republic of Iran Oil Minister

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In August 2021, [President Ebrahim Raisi](#) nominated Javad Oji as his Oil Minister, one of the most important posts in the Islamic Republic given the state's reliance on the oil and gas industry. A technocrat by background, Oji served as deputy oil minister under former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and in recent years has acted as a senior executive in energy companies controlled by conglomerates answering to [Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#). The US [designated](#) Oji in November 2020 for acting as a key component of the Supreme Leader's patronage network. The Islamic Consultative Assembly has ratified Oji as Oil Minister.

## **Early Career Through Ahmadinejad Administration**

Oji was born in 1967 in Shiraz and [graduated](#) with an oil engineering degree from Iran's Oil Industry University in 1988. According to state media, Oji graduated third in his class. He began his career working as an engineering analyst and subsequently advanced through the ranks of National Iranian Oil Company subsidiaries. In 2005, he was appointed managing director of Southern Zagros Oil and Gas Production Company, a position he held until 2009.

In 2012, the European Union [designated](#) Zagros Oil and Gas Production company due to its links to Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities or development of nuclear weapon delivery systems. The EU removed these sanctions as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or the Iran nuclear deal, in 2016. Canada had also designated Zagros Oil and Gas Production Company as an entity contributing to Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities or its development of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons or their delivery systems in 2013.

In the second Ahmadinejad administration (2009 – 2013), Oji acted as deputy oil minister and managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGS). He was simultaneously a member of the board of directors of the Oil Industry University and the Oil Industry Retirement Fund.

During his term as managing director of NIGS, Oji proposed launching the "Islamic Pipeline" after Iran was excluded from the Nabucco pipeline, which intended to deliver natural gas from the Caucasus to Europe by way of Turkey. Oji [envisioned](#) creating a rival pipeline that would extend through Iraq and Syria and eventually on to Europe, but the project ultimately went nowhere.

Despite [sitting](#) on one of the largest natural gas reserves in the world, the Islamic Republic's pariah status and risky business environment have left its natural gas sector underdeveloped and untouched by the liquified natural gas (LNG) revolution.

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Some oil development news sites have [written](#) that, following US sanctions during the Ahmadinejad administration, Oji transferred gold bars to neighboring countries to skirt sanctions and facilitate goods-for-goods deals.

## **Top Positions in Khamenei-controlled conglomerates**

After the end of the Ahmadinejad administration in 2013, Oji was purged from the ministry by then-Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh. After that, he acquired executive posts in energy conglomerates that answer only to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Oji was first appointed managing director and board of directors deputy chairman of Petro Mofid Oil and Gas Development Holding, a subsidiary of the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO). A 2013 Reuters investigation [estimated](#) EIKO's value at \$95 billion. In 2014, Oji was also appointed as Chairman of the board of directors for the Petrochemical Industries Investment Company, a subsidiary of Tamin Petroleum and Petrochemical Investment, the parent company of which is the Social Security Investment Company. Petrochemicals have [constituted](#) a key source of state income due to the crude oil embargo generating \$15 billion in 2020 alone. In 2017, Oji was appointed managing director of Mofid Economy Group, an EIKO subsidiary that oversees four energy and investment companies.

In 2019, Oji was appointed managing director of Sina Development Energy Holding, a subsidiary of Mostazafan Foundation, another multi-billion conglomerate that answers only to the Supreme Leader. The US designated Oji in 2020 when he was in that position. He has also served as a member of the board of directors of Razavi Oil and Gas Company, a subsidiary of the Imam Reza Shrine Foundation, yet another behemoth conglomerate that answers only to Khamenei. The current [president Ebrahim Raisi](#) was the foundation trustee from 2017 to 2019 before being appointed Judiciary branch chief.

Oji was reportedly [active](#) in Raisi's election campaign for 2021. He was Raisi's preference for Oil Minister over Rostam Qasemi, his former boss and Oil Minister under Ahmadinejad who recently has served as the Qods Force economic deputy (in 2019, Treasury [designated](#) Qasemi for a scheme in which he oversaw the moving of oil worth hundreds of millions of dollars or more through this network for the benefit of the brutal Assad regime, Hizballah, and other illicit actors). Oji's selection over Qasemi reflects clout and his connection to the Supreme Leader's inner circle.

## **What we can expect from Oji**

Oji faces perhaps the greatest challenge an Islamic Republic oil minister has faced since 1979. His predecessor Zanganeh had sought to attract foreign investment to inject hundreds of billions of dollars to modernize the industry, a goal he was unable to achieve, not the least

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because of US-led sanctions re-imposed in 2018 that targeted the Iranian oil sector. Iran's crude oil exports have suffered immensely due to the oil embargo, though Tehran has clung to a lifeline thanks to illicit [exports](#) to China and other unknown buyers, that amounted to an estimated 840,000 barrels per day in July 2021. Development of Iran's oil industry and increased crude oil exports are dependent on nuclear negotiations with the US, and whether the Islamic Republic can persuade major multinationals that it is a safe investment .

As Oil Minister, Oji will probably award even more kickbacks and [contracts](#) to energy firms and conglomerates affiliated with the Supreme Leader's business empire. He will also likely staff the ministry with individuals from those entities.

Another major challenge for Oji is OPEC. "He will have a tough challenge in defending Iran's position and protecting Iran from calls to cut production," [said](#) a consultant about Oji, "Many of Iran's seasoned OPEC hands are no longer there and [Oji] doesn't have the deep relationships there."