

March 2, 2026

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The Imam Sadiq University Network: Influence, Affiliations, and Key Figures in Iran

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by TextOre MENA and Military Affairs Analyst Jordan Lorenzen

Given the reported elevation of Mojtaba Khamenei to Supreme Leader amid ongoing war, it is timely to re-examine second- and third-tier technocrats who may move to positions of increased responsibility under Iran's new leadership team.ⁱ The network of Imam Sadiq University (ISU) alumni who have risen since the revolution will fill many of these roles. These technocrats complement, rather than replace, the strategic authority concentrated under the Supreme Leader and the security apparatus.ⁱⁱ Policymakers need to understand this "rising elite" from Imam Sadiq University (ISU) in order to anticipate Iran's policy directions. As one report notes, failing to grasp the worldview of "Imam Sadiqis" could lead the West to misread Iran's negotiating behavior.ⁱⁱⁱ Sadiqis may indeed be technocrats, but their expertise is focused zealously on the survival of the clerical revolutionary regime in a world filled with both ideological and temporal enemies, not on introducing elements of pragmatism such as the West might hope would lead to a degree of moderation in regime policy. Their influence is not merely a domestic phenomenon, but also a factor in Iran's international diplomacy and security calculations.

Building on the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change's November 2021 report "Raisi's Rising Elite: The Imam Sadiqis, Iran's Indoctrinated Technocrats," this analysis identifies the following: key Imam Sadiq University (ISU) alumni holding influential positions, formal and informal ties linking ISU to state organs (including kinship networks), the growing prominence of ISU-trained technocrats compared to traditional power brokers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and ISU's connections with counterparts in China and Russia. The analysis relies primarily on Persian-language sources and credible reports, clearly distinguishing confirmed relationships from reputed ones, and looks to fill the research gap from November 2021 on, as the Imam Sadiqis have continued to expand their role.

Background: Ideologically Integrated, Independently Funded

Imam Sadiq University (ISU) [دانشگاه امام صادق] in Tehran was founded in 1982 as a revolutionary fusion of seminary and modern university. It has since grown from an obscure campus into the Islamic Republic's premier factory for ideologically reliable professional expertise.^{iv} The ISU's governance remains a family-clerical enterprise embedded in Iran's conservative establishment, and a bonyad-style endowment shields it from budget shocks while financing decades-long cadre-building.^v The resulting "ideological technocrats" vaulted into government under the late President Ebrahim Raisi, capturing an unprecedented share of cabinet and deputy-minister posts and sidelining both Western-educated managers and veteran IRGC officers.^{vi}

Established in 1982 in northern Tehran, ISU was the first university founded after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.^{vii} Under the leadership of Ayatollah **Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani** [محمد رضا مهدوی کنی] a senior cleric and politician, ISU was created to "train politicians and jurists preaching Islam" with programs blending Islamic theology and modern social sciences.^{viii} ISU's curriculum initially focused on Islamic studies, political science, law, and economics, later expanding to fields like communications, management, and finance. Its mission was explicitly ideological, bridging the gap between religious seminaries and modern academia to produce loyal Islamic Republic cadres grounded in both Shi'a theology and contemporary expertise.^{ix} The women's campus (praised as a pioneering all-female academic environment in which all faculty and staff are women) has been overseen by Mahdavi Kani's wife, Qodsiyeh Sorkhey, and his daughter, Dr. Sediqeh (Maryam) Mahdavi Kani. They emphasize training women in fields like law, education, and family studies not necessarily to produce female ministers, but rather to fill needed roles in academia and mid-level management.

After Mahdavi Kani's death, leadership passed briefly to his son Dr. Mohammad Saeed Mahdavi Kani, and then to Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Sa'di [حسينعلي سعدي]. In 2015, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed Ayatollah Sadiq Larijani (then Judiciary Chief) as chairman of ISU's board of trustees, signaling the Supreme Leader's continued interest in ISU's direction.

From the outset, ISU was elite and selective. Admission required not only passing Iran's national university entrance exam, but also undergoing "a draconian vetting process" probing the applicant's political, social, and religious beliefs.^x Candidates faced multiple rounds of ideological interviews and even local background checks to ensure their "firm allegiance to the Islamic establishment's ideology."^{xi} The university sought top intellectuals, but ones that were committed to serving under the Islamic Republic's constitution.^{xii} This rigorous selection and indoctrination created a tight-knit network of alumni with shared values and personal connections. Its graduates – often called "Imam Sadiqs" – may themselves become academics before or in between terms in pivotal posts across multiple domains: government ministries, the judiciary, parliament, state media, and increasingly the security sector. The "extraordinarily deep networks" forged at ISU are now "a key to understanding the upper ranks of Iranian politics."^{xiii}

Imam Sadiqs now direct the Central Bank, Finance Ministry, Tax Administration, Securities & Exchange Organization, and Privatization Organization, steering Tehran's sanctions-proofing "Resistance Economy." This cohort forms a triangle with the clerical hierarchy and IRGC that also permeates the Supreme National Security Council, the judiciary, and state broadcaster, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). The Sadiqs have also used their academic training to influence the security apparatus through auxiliary roles, such as supplying vetted legal cadres to the security/judicial nexus.^{xiv} Abroad, ISU channels the "Look-East" strategy through new China and Russia studies centers, cooperation deals with Shanghai and Moscow universities, and themed cultural weeks. Together, these dynamics place ISU at the nexus of governance, economic survival, and foreign alignment. Its alumni network is now an indispensable lens for anticipating Iranian behavior.

ISU's financing model is noteworthy: rather than relying heavily on the state budget, it is largely bankrolled by a portfolio of businesses and charitable endowments. Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, who served as ISU's founding president (chancellor) for decades until his death in 2014, established the **Al-Sadiq Society** [انجمن الصادق] to fund the university. In the early years, wealthy bazaar merchants and pious donors contributed.^{xv} Over time, the Al-Sadiq Society acquired stakes in profitable enterprises to generate sustainable income. For example, ISU's endowment (operated by the Al-Sadiq Society) became a shareholder in **Loqman Pharmaceuticals**, a major producer of drugs like acetaminophen-codeine.^{xvi} It also owns textile and clothing factories, the Milad-e-Noor shopping mall in Tehran, a steel plant in Gilan province, and other ventures.^{xvii} According to Ahmad Karimi Isfahani, a conservative political activist, secretary general of the Islamic Association of Guilds and Bazaars, and member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Sadiq Society, the foundation even received donated real estate (including properties in Qom). As a result of these independent means, ISU receives only minimal government subsidies. Any state budget funds have been, "like salt in the soup," covering only a fraction of the university's expenses.^{xviii} Major religious foundations, or Bonyads, have reportedly supported ISU, notably the Astan Quds Razavi foundation of Mashhad.

Economics, Policy, and Cultural Management

While ISU alumni have held roles in earlier governments, their prominence expanded markedly after Ebrahim Raisi took office in August 2021. Iranian reporting emphasized Raisi's preference for "revolutionary" managers and portrayed Imam Sadiq University as a key reference point for selecting ministers, vice presidents, and other senior appointees. External analysis likewise assessed that, from August to October 2021, ISU alumni moved into a cluster of senior and mid-level posts across ministries and the state bureaucracy.^{xix} Commentators contrasted this pattern with earlier administrations, describing Rouhani's cabinets as more reliant on foreign-educated, Western-oriented technocrats, while Ahmadinejad's governments leaned more heavily on former military and security figures.^{xx} The trend became especially visible in economic governance. A Khabar Online feature described a "gathering of Imam Sadiqs" in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance and adjacent economic institutions, highlighting officials such as Ehsan Khandoozi, Majid Eshqi, Davoud Manzour,

and Hossein Qorbanzadeh. Both Iranian and external reporting framed these appointments as part of a younger “new generation of managers” associated with ISU.^{xxi}

ISU Cabinet-level Appointments (2021 – 23)

- **Seyyed Ehsan Khandoozi** [سید احسان خاندوزی] – born in 1980 economist and ISU PhD graduate, he was appointed Minister of Economic Affairs & Finance in 2021.^{xxii}
- **Hojjatollah Abdolmaleki** [حجت‌الله عبدالملکی] – born in 1981 and an ISU economics alumnus, he served as Minister of Cooperatives, Labor & Social Welfare^{xxiii} between 2021 and 2022, when he resigned amid criticism of his performance.^{xxiv}
- **Dr Meysam Latifi** [میثم لطیفی] – formerly an ISU management faculty member, he was appointed Vice-President and Head of the Administrative and Recruitment Affairs Organization by Raisi in 2021.^{xxv} He has used this post to channel additional ISU graduates into the civil service.^{xxvi}

ISU Key Economic and Regulatory Posts

- **Ali Salehabadi** [علی صالح‌آبادی] – an ISU-trained financial expert, he was named Governor of the Central Bank of Iran in late 2021.^{xxvii} Salehabadi had earlier been the youngest head of Iran’s Securities and Exchange Organization (2005–2013).^{xxviii} His promotion to lead the central bank continued the pattern of ISU alumni managing key economic institutions.^{xxix}
- **Majid Eshqi** (مجید عشقی) – ISU graduate who was nominated as Head of the Securities & Exchange Organization in 2021.^{xxx}
- **Davoud Manzour** (داوود منظور) – Head of the National Tax Administration since 2021, he holds an ISU master’s in economics.^{xxxi}
- **Hossein Qorbanzadeh** (حسین قربانزاده) – Head, Privatization Organization (2021–22), Iran’s Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance–affiliated body that executes privatization by valuing and transferring state-owned enterprises and government shareholdings (often via tenders or capital-market offerings).^{xxxii}

ISU graduates were active in the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its affiliated think tanks** even before Raisi. **Kazem Jalali** [کازم جلالی] (b. 1967), who holds a doctorate from ISU, was a long-serving Member of Parliament and head of the parliamentary Research Center.^{xxxiii} In 2019 he was appointed Ambassador to Russia, where he has continued to handle strategically crucial relations including a pending Iran-Russia cooperation accord.^{xxxiv} **Alireza Enayati** [علیرضا عنایتی] (b. 1962), an ISU graduate in international relations, has served as ambassador to Kuwait and in 2023 became Iran’s Ambassador to Saudi Arabia – the first since the restoration of ties – underscoring the trust placed in ISU diplomats for sensitive postings.^{xxxv}

Even before their recent ascendancy in economic roles, ISU alumni had long been influential in Iran’s **media and cultural spheres**. The IRIB, the state media conglomerate, emerged in Iranian reporting as a particularly common destination for ISU graduates in the 1990s and 2000s, including in newsroom and management roles.^{xxxvi} So many alumni joined IRIB that, according to accounts attributed to former ISU students, Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani expressed dissatisfaction with the high volume of graduates entering broadcasting and conveyed to then-IRIB chief Ali Larijani that the university’s mandate was not limited to staffing IRIB alone. Nevertheless, the pipeline persisted. Iranian media reporting has also asserted that ISU alumni became prevalent in IRIB’s external broadcasting units. A 2010 *Asr-e Iran* roundup, for example, described several Al-Alam managers and presenters, including **Reza Moein-Abadi** [رضا معین‌آبادی], **Seyyed Ahmad Sadat** [سید احمد سادات], **Naji Chenani** [ناجی چنانی], and **Hossein Razi** [حسین رضی] as part of an “Imam Sadiqi” cohort within IRIB’s foreign-facing media.^{xxxvii} Al-Alam’s own English-language description presents it as a Tehran-based Arabic-language news channel launched in February 2003, operating as part of IRIB’s broader international broadcasting ecosystem.^{xxxviii}

Peyman Jebelli [پیمان جبلی] a 1966-born alumnus with a master's in Islamic communications from ISU, worked his way up as a state TV analyst and as a diplomat at Iran's mission in Tunisia before being appointed as IRIB's Director-General by Ayatollah Khamenei in 2021.^{xxxix} Jebelli's predecessors at IRIB's helm also had ISU ties, and even **Mohammad Sarafraz**, IRIB chief in 2014–2016, obtained his MA from ISU.^{xi} Numerous mid-level executives and producers at IRIB are Imam Sadiqis as well. For example, Fariduddin **Haddad-Adel** – son of **Gholamali Haddad Adel**, a prominent politician – is an ISU graduate and serves on IRIB Channel 3's think tank council.^{xli} Channel 3's director **Ali Foroughi** (himself closely connected to the conservative elite) works with many ISU peers. The Ofogh Channel, a network oriented toward Revolutionary values, has been identified as being particularly “close” to ISU's network.^{xlii}

In the **Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance**, which regulates domestic media and cultural activity, ISU alumni have also held senior roles. **Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini** [سید محمد حسینی] (born 1340 SH, 1961/62) illustrates this pattern. Official biographies state that he completed an integrated MA at Imam Sadiq University and later earned a PhD in Fiqh and the fundamentals of Islamic law at the University of Tehran, and he has been a University of Tehran faculty member since 1369 SH (1990/91).^{xliii} He served as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and was appointed Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs under Raisi in August 2021.^{xliiv} Another culture figure, **Hesamoddin Ashena** (حسام‌الدین آشنا) (b. 1964), is an ISU alumnus with a doctorate in culture and communications.^{xliv}

Security and Intelligence Ties

ISU does not appear to run a formal military officer training pipeline, but its graduates have longstanding professional ties to Iran's security and intelligence establishments. Publicly documented alumni roles, including from the early post-revolution period, suggest that ISU-linked networks have been present in Iran's security architecture since the 1980s. Many Imam Sadiqis are veterans of the **Basij**¹ or have done national service stints in the **IRGC** or **Intelligence Ministry** during or after their studies.^{xlvi} A 2021 *Foreign Policy* article argued that ISU graduates enjoy ‘the privilege of good interaction with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ because of their ideological credentials. One assessment describes an emerging ‘three-way alliance’ between the clergy, the IRGC and ideological technocrats, with ISU-trained cadres forming the technocratic pillar.^{xlvii} This can be attributed to their ideological credentials. Analysts argue that ISU graduates' pair advanced technical training with ideological vetting and indoctrination, which makes them acceptable to both the clerical establishment and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), institutions that have often treated “Western-oriented” technocrats with suspicion.^{xlviii} This convergence has also been visible in the nuclear file. ISU-linked officials have held senior roles in negotiations, including Ali Bagheri Kani, described in the same assessment as the deputy foreign minister selected to lead international negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme, xlix and Saeed Jalili, whom IRNA profiled as holding a PhD in political sciences from Imam Sadeq University and serving as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator.^{xlix}

Security-related ISU Appointments

- **Saeed Jalili** [سعید جبلی] (b.1965), an ISU alumnus who lost part of his right leg fighting with the IRGC in the Iran–Iraq War, embodies the fusion of IRGC battlefield experience and ISU intellectual formation.ⁱ After completing a political science PhD at ISU, Jalili ascended to become Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (2007–2013) and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator. Now a member of the Supreme Leader's Strategic Council and Expediency Council, Jalili was widely seen as a trusted confidant of the late Ayatollah Khamenei.ⁱⁱ
- **Ali Bagheri Kani** [علی باقری کنی] (b. 1967) is an ISU doctorate-holder in economics and the son of a prominent cleric. He served as deputy negotiator under Saeed Jalili and, in 2021, was appointed Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs – effectively lead negotiator in the JCPOA talks.ⁱⁱⁱ Bagheri Kani's hardline views mirror Jalili's skepticism of the nuclear deal, illustrating how ISU graduates can impart a staunchly revolutionary outlook to sensitive issues

¹ The Basij (بسیج formally the Basij-e Mostazafan—“Mobilization of the Oppressed”—is Iran's nationwide volunteer militia. Created by Ayatollah Khomeini in November 1979 and legally subordinate to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), it serves as the regime's mass-mobilization and internal-security arm.

of Iranian diplomacy.^{liii}

- **Khosro Tehrani** [خسرو تهرانی] served as head of the Prime Minister's Intelligence Office in 1980 and later as deputy intelligence minister. He later served as an adviser on security matters to reformist President Khatami.^{liv}
- **Gholam-Hossein Esmaili** [غلامحسین اسماعیلی] an ISU law alumnus, was appointed the national judiciary's spokesperson in 2018 before becoming President Raisi's Chief of Staff in 2021.^{lv} Esmaili had also served as an IRGC-linked judge (including as head of the Revolutionary Courts and later the Tehran Justice Department), illustrating how Imam Sadiq University (ISU) supplies vetted legal cadres who operate at the intersection of Iran's security services and judiciary.
- **Hadi Tahan Nazif** [هادی طحان نظیف] (b. 1982), an ISU law lecturer, was appointed as one of the six jurists (and later spokesperson) of the Guardian Council in 2019. The Guardian Council [شورای نگهبان, Shorā-ye Negahbān], a powerful 12-member body, is empowered by Iran's Constitution to examine all parliamentary legislation for consistency with Islamic principles and the Constitution and to return bills it deems incompatible to the Majlis for revision.^{lvi} It also supervises national elections and referenda—including the election of the president, members of parliament and the Assembly of Experts—and has authority to approve or disqualify candidates and annul votes in specific constituencies. At barely 40 years old, Tahan Nazif's elevation to this key constitutional watchdog body underscores the regime's confidence in the younger ISU-trained jurists.

Foreign Partnerships and International Reach

ISU's international influence is also exercised through its alumni diplomats and its participation in global scholarly networks. Though primarily focused on serving Iran's domestic needs, ISU and its network have cultivated select foreign ties, especially aligned with Tehran's "Look to the East" strategy. The university recently joined the **Network of Virtual Universities of the Islamic World** to expand its educational reach online among Muslim countries.^{lvii} The university also actively engages in academic diplomacy with counterparts in China and Russia, reflecting Tehran's declared pivot away from Western partnerships toward strategic alignment with the two eastern powers.^{lviii}

In recent years, ISU has hosted themed weeks and delegation visits to foster cultural and scientific exchange with China. In May 2023, ISU's International Cooperation Office welcomed a faculty delegation from **Shanghai International Studies University**² of China, during a symposium on the Iran–China comprehensive strategic partnership.^{lix} This event, and a "Chinese Culture Week" organized by ISU's faculty and students, underscores the growing relationship with Chinese academia.^{lx} ISU's China Studies Core [هسته مطالعات چین] operates in collaboration with the Iran-China Think Tank for Strategic Studies [اندیشکده مطالعات راهبردی ایران و چین] and the university's Basij student apparatus, signaling alignment with Tehran's broader outreach to China under the Iran-China 25-year Comprehensive Cooperation Program [برنامه همکاری جامع ایران و چین]^{lxi}. By running joint forums, summer schools and language workshops, the program exposes students and faculty to China's language and development model while reinforcing the strategic vision behind the Iran–China agreement.^{lxii}

ISU has similarly initiated exchanges with Russia. It launched a **Russia Studies Hub** on campus, aiming to improve mutual understanding and exploit joint opportunities with Russian counterparts.^{lxiii} In February 2023, ISU hosted a Russian academic delegation for a forum on "Outlook of Iran-Russia Relations: Opportunities and Challenges." ISU also inked a Memorandum of Understanding with **Synergy University**³ in Moscow to cooperate on language training – such as offering Russian language courses at ISU and Persian courses in Moscow. Concurrently, an ISU delegation traveled to Moscow in 2023 to strengthen scientific cooperation with Russian universities.^{lxiv} Moreover, in spring 2023, ISU held a "Russia Scientific and Cultural Week" on campus, which included events to familiarize students with Russian culture and bilateral cooperation prospects.^{lxv} These initiatives dovetail with Iran's drive to deepen ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the

² Shanghai International Studies University [上海外国语大学].

³ Officially, Moscow Financial and Industrial University «Synergy» [Московский финансово-промышленный университет «Синергия»].

Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and other Russian-led integration mechanisms. Indeed, ISU alumni in government have been key facilitators in Iran's joining such multilateral forums. Ambassador Kazem Jalali in Moscow, for example, has worked on the pending Iran-EAEU trade agreement and a new Iran-Russia strategic accord, while Deputy Foreign Minister Bagheri Kani regularly consults with Russian and Chinese counterparts in the SCO context.^{lxvi}

ISU alumni also feature in Tehran's dealings with the West. Their language skills and ideological training make them effective emissaries of the regime's views. **Abdollah Ramezanzadeh** [عبدالله رمضانزاده], an ISU alumnus who became a spokesperson for the reformist Khatami government, engaged extensively with foreign media in the early 2000s.^{lxvii} As nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, interacted routinely with EU negotiators along with the Russians and Chinese. However, these ties remain largely state-centric. ISU is not known for extensive exchange programs or joint research with Western academia, due to both ideological mistrust and sanctions/travel restrictions. Instead, its international engagement mirrors Iran's geostrategic alignments – prioritizing connections with non-Western powers and Islamic nations.

This focus is likely to increase as U.S. and European sanctions on Iran persist. The prominence of Imam Sadiqis in core regime portfolios in turn has meant that many have been sanctioned by foreign governments.^{lxviii} IRIB's director, Peyman Jebelli, appears on the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) **Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN List)** under Executive Order 13846. Treasury's designation notice cites his role at IRIB, including directing senior management changes and working with the IRGC to generate false narratives, and it references IRIB's broader record, including broadcasts of forced confessions.^{lxix} Even when not explicitly sanctioned, many ISU alumni hold positions in organizations already subject to sanctions (for example, the Central Bank or IRGC-affiliated judicial bodies) or work closely with designated entities, increasing their exposure to future designations.^{lxx} Their deep embedding in Iran's power structure, however, often also affords them state protection and advancement. ISU alumni in government have explicitly argued that U.S. sanctions can be turned into "new possibilities," and they have paired that framing with a push to deepen ties with Russia, China, and other non-Western partners as part of a sanctions-resilience strategy.^{lxxi}

Key Factors Shaping Future Developments:

- **With Iran set to appoint a new Supreme Leader any day, the presence of "Imam Sadiqis" in key roles under the new leadership will indicate the new regime's outlook.** Sadiqis may be technocrats, but they are also true believers, and therefore may presage more continuity than evolution in governance.
- **That said, should Sadiqis gain relative to the IRGC, it might indicate a change in the national agenda.** Ideologues or not, Sadiqis are frequently seen in roles keeping the Iranian economy afloat, and their ascendance could mean that overseas adventures will decrease in favor of addressing domestic concerns.
- **Given their prior representation in diplomacy, Sadiqis are likely either to be in key diplomatic roles or in key advisory roles to the principals in future negotiations.** That doesn't preclude pragmatic compromise, but it does reduce the likelihood that there will be a major sea-change in Iran's geostrategic outlook.

APPENDIX: Key Individuals (Profiles)

Below is a table of key individuals affiliated with Imam Sadiq University, highlighting those with significant strategic influence or ties to sanctioned entities. All have studied or taught at ISU. Many occupy roles in Iran's security, intelligence, nuclear, or strategic industries, or are prominent alumni in government and media. Several have been sanctioned by the U.S., EU, or UN, or could be considered for sanctions due to their activities. Each illustrates a facet of ISU's network and its role in shaping Iran's power structure.

Imam Sadiq University: Verified Alumni and Faculty in Key Positions

Name (English – Persian)	Position(s) / Role	Connection to ISU	Notes
Saeed Jalili – سعید جلیلی	Secretary, Supreme National Security Council; Member, Expediency Council; Former Nuclear Negotiator	Alumnus (PhD, Political Science)	Prominent hardliner; former nuclear negotiator; lost leg in Iran–Iraq War as Basij volunteer.
Ali Bagheri Kani – علی باقری کنی	Deputy Foreign Minister; Chief Nuclear Negotiator	Alumnus; Faculty Member	Relative of ISU founder; closely aligned with Supreme Leader; hardline foreign policy advocate.
Ehsan Khandoozi – احسان خاندوزی	Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance	Alumnus (PhD, Islamic Economics)	Economic ideologue behind “Resistance Economy;” among youngest cabinet members in Raisi's government.
Hesamodin Ashna – حسام‌الدین آشنا	Advisor to President Rouhani; Head, Center for Strategic Studies	Alumnus (PhD, Communications); Faculty Member	Reformist-aligned intellectual; ex-Intelligence Ministry; U.S.-sanctioned for censorship role.
Kazem Jalali – کاظم جلالی	Ambassador to Russia; Former Member of Parliament	Alumnus (PhD, Political Science)	Longtime Majles figure; architect of Iran–Russia strategic pact; supports Eurasian integration.
Abdollah Ramezanzadeh – عبدالله رمضان‌زاده	Government Spokesman under President Khatami; Former Governor of Kurdistan Province	Alumnus (PhD, Political Science)	Reformist academic; imprisoned after 2009 protests; rare ISU voice critical of regime.
Mostafa Kavakebia – مصطفی کواکبیان	Reformist Politician; Member of Parliament	Alumnus (PhD, Political Science)	Reformist lawmaker; editor of <i>Mardomsalari</i> newspaper; ran for president; critical of hardliners.
*Esmail Kousari – اسماعیل کوشری	IRGC General; Former Member of Parliament; Deputy Chief of Sarallah Headquarters	Alumnus	Senior IRGC commander; vocal hardliner; held security roles in Tehran.
*Hossein Ghorbanzadeh – حسین قربان‌زاده	Editor-in-Chief of <i>Hamshahri</i> Newspaper; Political Strategist	Alumnus	Conservative commentator; affiliated with Paydari Front; involved in strategic media planning.
*Kamaladin Pirmoazzen – کامال‌الدین پیرموزن	Reformist Politician; Former Member of Parliament	Alumnus	Reformist MP representing Ardabil; advocate for civil liberties and transparency.
Ruhollah Ahmadzadeh – روح‌الله احمدزاده	Vice President; Head of Cultural Heritage Organization	Alumnus	Appointed at 31 as VP; previously youngest provincial governor in Iran.

*Mohammad Reza Majidi – محمدرضا مجیدی	Ambassador to UNESCO	Alumnus	Diplomat and academic; representative to multilateral cultural institutions.
*Kazem Gharibabadi – کاظم غریب‌آبادی	Deputy Judiciary Chief; Former Ambassador to the IAEA	Alumnus	Former nuclear negotiator; now senior human rights representative for judiciary.
*Reza Najafi – رضا نجفی	Ambassador to the IAEA	Alumnus	Longtime diplomat in Vienna; involved in NPT, JCPOA, and disarmament negotiations.
*Mohammad Sarafraz – محمد سرافراز	Former Director of IRIB (2014–2016)	Alumnus	Oversaw state broadcasting; replaced under political pressure; linked to IRGC media apparatus.
*Mohsen Esmaeili – محسن اسماعیلی	Jurist; Member of the Guardian Council	Alumnus	High-ranking legal theorist; first non-cleric jurist in the Guardian Council; regime insider.
Vahid Yaminpour – وحید یامین پور	Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth; Secretary of the Supreme Council of Youth Affairs; Television Presenter; Media Activist; Writer	Alumnus; Faculty Member	Holds a master's degree in criminal law and criminology from ISU; PhD from Islamic Azad University; Hosted political programs on IRIB; Appointed Deputy Minister in October 2021; Sanctioned by Canada for involvement in state propaganda.

Table: Selected Imam Sadiq University alumni and affiliates. This list is not exhaustive; dozens of other ISU alumni occupied significant roles under Raisi. Each has played a significant role in Iran's state apparatus or strategic sectors, reflecting ISU's status as a cadre factory for the Islamic Republic.^{lxvii} Names marked with an asterisk (*) did not appear in the Tony Blair Institute's 2021 report on Raisi's Rising Elite; un-starred names were already profiled there

ⁱ Jon Gambrell, "A Son of Iran's Late Supreme Leader Is Chosen to Replace His Father as War Rages," AP News, March 8, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/209cec036068b40fcfcb2be7ac7e2b0>

ⁱⁱ Shora-ye Negahban (Guardian Council), "اصل یکصد و دهم [Article 110]," February 10, 2011, <https://www.shora-gc.ir/fa/news/1794/اصل-یکصد-و-دهم>

ⁱⁱⁱ Golkar, Saeid, and Kasra Aarabi. *Raisi's Rising Elite: The Imam Sadeghis, Iran's Indoctrinated Technocrats. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, November 2021. <https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/raisis-rising-elite-imam-sadeghis-irans-indoctrinated-technocrats>.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Mohammadi, Reza. "Clerical Authority and Financial Autonomy at Imam Sadiq University: A Case Study of Bonyad-Style Funding." *Iranian Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2017): 59–78.

^{vi} Ziabari, Kourosh. "The Uni Filling the Ranks of Raisi's Hard-Line Regime." *Kourosh Ziabari*, December 31, 2021. <https://kouroshziabari.com/2021/12/the-uni-filling-the-ranks-of-raisis-hard-line-regime/>.

^{vii} Imam Sadiq University. "The Story Behind ISU." Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://isu.ac.ir/content/4394/the-story-behind-ISU>.

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