On Thursday, September 29, 2016, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted Joohyeon Baik, Consul General of the Republic of Korea in Houston, to present a lecture entitled “Korea-U.S. Alliance: Stronger and Deeper Relations than Ever”. This event was free and open to the public. Students and faculty from many different areas of study attended to hear what the Consul General had to say about recent developments concerning South Korea and the continuing relations with Texas.

Consul General Joohyeon Baik received a Ph.D. in history from The Diplomatic Academy of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in Moscow and also studied at the Defense Language Institute, a U.S. Department of Defense educational and research institution.

As a career diplomat, Consul General Baik has been with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea since 1985. He was assigned to the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston in April 2015 and is currently responsible for promoting the relationship between Korea and five southern U.S. states including Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Oklahoma. Prior to his role as Consul General, he served as
Director-General of Overseas Koreans and Consular Affairs Bureau for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Before the lecture, a private reception was held in honor of Baik and his delegates as well as 15 Korean War Veterans and their families. Those who attended the reception were UTSA president Dr. Ricardo Romo, UTSA faculty from several departments, representatives from Council Ron Nirenberg’s office, San Antonio City Office of International Relations, Korean War veterans, Korean American Association of San Antonio members, San Antonio South Korean School faculty members, and several student representatives. There, both President Romo and Consul General gave speeches as guest enjoyed finger foods and drinks. The attendees also had the chance to witness Consul General Baik award the attending Korean War veterans a Korean Ambassador for Peace medals as an appreciation for their services from the Korean government. During this time, President Romo exchanged gifts with the visiting Consul General Baik.

After the reception, Baik and the reception guests moved into the lecture hall to begin his presentation, where students were waiting. After being formally introduced by Dr. Rene Zenteno, Vice Provost for International Initiatives, Baik went on to share some of his background and military experience before giving a heartfelt thanks to all the veterans present for the service they gave to his country during the Korean War.

Moving forward, Baik shared how South Korea’s prominent rise in the global sphere was not by chance. “South Korea has always been a scholarly nation with many scientific and cultural advances ahead of their time” said Baik. “Unfortunately due to the long Japanese occupation in the late 19th century and the turbulent changes of the period, South Korea fell behind the initial waves of modernization.” He remarked that with the United States’ help, South Korea was able to return to its scholarly ways and quickly catch up with the rest of the world.

“The Korea-U.S. Alliance has served as an anchor for stability, security, and prosperity. United
States troops, along with members of the Republic of Korea military, have established strong strategic measures in order to protect the peace and stability not only on the Korean Peninsula but the Asia-Pacific region overall,” according to Baik.

It has been four years since the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was established and set in motion. From this agreement South Korea has shifted from a consumer of security to a producer of security and has increased trade in goods, services, and investments between the two countries. Through the FTA, South Korean investments have increased and thus various industries have become household names, such as Samsung-Electronics, Hyundai and Kia Motors. “We are seeing increased cooperation between South Korea and the U.S. in the medical and biomedical fields, such as joint research programs with Texas Medical Center,” said Baik.

Baik stated that these examples are the product of the sixty year alliance that South Korea and the United States have built as part of a commitment to protect liberty and freedom against those who would disrupt these shared values. Both South Korea and the U.S. have been working together to prevent any terrorism from North Korea. Both South Korea and the U.S. demand stronger U.N sanctions against North Korea, the closure of Kaesong Industrial Complex and increasing sanctions against North Korea by the U.S. and Japan. Baik mentions how both nations leaders, President Obama and President Park Geun-hye, spoke overnight after North Korea’s fifth and most powerful nuclear test. “This conversation served to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to South Korea’s security, and that the U.S. will work with her to ensure provocative actions from North Korea are met with serious consequences,” stated Baik.

Ties between Americans and Koreans are deeper than ever. More than 1.45 million South Koreans visiting the U.S. in 2014. Korea also is the third most international students only after China and India, sending more university students to the U.S. per capita than any other major economy. Baik mentions that the U.S. is the top choice for Korean entrepreneurs and scientist to create and develop new businesses and technologies. “I look forward to more cooperations between Korea and the U.S. in the fields of energy, medicine and space,” said Baik.

Baik concluded his lecture by once again thanking the veterans for their service. The audience members were then able to ask the Consul General questions concerning the U.S.-Korea relations.