On Wednesday, February 28, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted Koichiro Bansho, retired Lieutenant General from the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), who gave a lecture on the importance of Japan and the United States’ inseparable bond from the historical and security perspectives. Bansho also spoke about the history of the alliance between the two countries, looked at past and present relations, and talked about the future of the alliance going forward.

Dr. René Zenteno, Vice Provost for International Initiatives and Senior International Officer at UTSA, opened the event by thanking special guests and audience for attending the lecture as well as the staff members of the East Asia Institute for hosting the event. He also stressed the importance of UTSA’s collaborating with the Consulate General of Japan in Houston to promote cultural exchange through various activities and events here in San Antonio. In addition, Zenteno mentioned the example of how UTSA graduates are actively participating in programs like the JET Program, in which UTSA alumni are selected to go to Japan to teach English to promote English language education and cultural exchange at the “grassroots, citizen-to-citizen” level.

Zenteno also mentioned how ecstatic he had been when Kumamon, mascot of San Antonio’s sister city Kumamoto, came to visit UTSA. "Kumamon was able to meet with the University’s mascot, Rowdy the Roadrunner, said Zenteno."It truly showed that we are connected!"

Before Bansho delivered his lecture, Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of the EAI, welcomed to the podium Rudy Alba, Executive Associate of San Japan, who presented a check to the EAI, that will be used.
San Japan Scholarship Winners with Rudy Alba (second from left)

Yao then introduced Ryuji Iwasaki, Deputy Consul General, who explained the important friendship between Japan and San Antonio and emphasized strengthening our partnership for the future. After that, Iwasaki introduced Lieutenant General Koichiro Bansho, listing his achievements and accomplishments and his importance as a figure of Japan. Furthermore, Iwasaki went over some history of Japan-U.S. relations, the current status, and the major issues facing the two countries and how we can help each other.

After Bansho began his lecture on Japan-U.S. security relations, covering the history, current situation, and future from the security and military’s point of view.

When speaking about the history of Japanese-U.S. relations, Bansho started with the help that each country gave to each other in past natural disasters that affected each country, such as the San Francisco Earthquake (1906) & The Great Kanto Earthquake (1923), which strengthened the two countries' relationship.

Bansho also explained the differences during the 1940’s such as Iwojima, and how the differences separated Japan and the United States during that time. However, he believed on the 75th anniversary of Iwojima, the connections between the two countries became stronger than ever and that they were headed in the right direction.

Bansho also talked about one of the biggest threats to Japan-U.S. relations – North Korea. "North Korea has become more and more aggressive with their military power," said Bansho. "The power of ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) of North Korea is near perfection on a weapon of mass destruction." Bansho also explained the need for Japan and the United States to keep the pressure on North Korea to ensure that they change their mind when it comes to nuclear weapons.
Another security point Bansho made was on China’s military spending, he stated that “China’s defense budget was around 150 to 160 billion dollars.” He stressed the importance of the protection of the South China Sea set seven guidelines on what to follow to ensure stability in the region. Bansho also briefly touched on Russia and other potential threats to peace in our modern day world. He ended his lecture by mentioning how close Japan and the U.S. have become and the desire of both to make the bond stronger in the many years to come.

Towards the end of the lecture, Bansho referred to a saying he learned in the past, which is “A friend in need is a friend indeed,” stating “I was impressed and moved because the U.S. supported me through their own efforts and am very happy that they are our allies and friends”.

Bansho then finished by taking questions from the audience, which were mainly regarding hot topics such as Russia and what Japan and the United States can do in regards to future issues that will be presented to us. Overall, everyone seemed pleased with his answers and statements, and the event ended with an ovation from the audience.

As we move towards the global-oriented future, relations between countries will only become more imperative, as such, Bansho’s observations and outlook show that while there is much uncertainty requiring caution, he believes we can move forward to a brighter tomorrow.

The UTSA East Asia Institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures with a special focus on China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education,