Fukushima Lawsuit Reveals Price of 'Abenomics'
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The 26 U.S. military personnel suing Tokyo Electric Power Co. over its Fukushima disaster are playing a key role in exposing the dark side of "Abenomics."

Shinzo Abe wasn't prime minister on March 11, 2011 when a 9-magnitude quake and giant tsunami forever changed the relationship between nature and the reactors in Japan's midst. As Tepco's reactor melted down, causing the worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl, Japan came dangerously close to losing Tokyo.

It was Abe's Liberal Democratic Party that over half a century of rule created the system that allowed Tepco to put the third-largest economy at risk of what Japanese call 3/11.

At issue is Japan's potent "nuclear village," the nexus of power companies and pro-nuclear regulators, bureaucrats and researchers. The two prime ministers prior to Abe were members of the Democratic Party of Japan and wanted to rein in this corrupt and complacent industry. Yoshihiko Noda, Abe's immediate predecessor, pledged to phase out nuclear power by 2040.

In December, voters returned the LDP to power, and Abe wasted no time scrapping that plan. He has quietly, but steadily, worked to preserve the supremacy of nuclear power. That might be fine if Japan weren't among the most seismically active nations. Hence the overwhelming public support for finding alternatives to nuclear power.

Abe's push for a nuclear future means his party learned little from 3/11. That's why the Tepco lawsuit is as important as it is timely. Its allegations that company officials lied about radiation levels U.S. military staffers faced while assisting in relief efforts 24 months ago is pushing Tepco back into the headlines and onto the hot seat. The plaintiffs seek more than $2 billion in compensation, says Stars and Stripes newspaper.

Few would quibble with Abe's determination to revive Japan's economy. If Abenomics succeeds, it will add fresh dynamism to a world in need of growth engines. But that may come

at a big price in the long run. The slower Japan moves to reduce its reliance on reactors, the more its 126 million people will be at grave risk when the next giant quake occurs -- and it will.

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