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*Technical, Tactical And Strategic
Challenges Facing The South African
Government In The Multilateral Trade
System And In Relation To The WTO¹*

by
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Introduction

Faced with questions and critical analyses by independent non-governmental analysts with regard to the general approach and specific positions adopted by the South African government in this country's external trade relations and negotiations, overburdened trade officials in the Department of Trade (DTI) are known to reply that they are "merely doing their jobs as trade negotiators". Some respond defensively that they are "simply technical personnel" focusing on the immediate legal or practical trade issues at hand, and that they are not responsible for the broader economic and political dimensions and strategic frameworks for SA's international trade relations. Whereas, of course, no analyses are neutral and 'merely technical'. Nor are they formulated in intellectual vacuums. South African 'technical' officials at all levels regularly make what are political statements in their public presentations and arguments about the international trade system and the global economy. And these arguments are - consciously or not - based on certain theoretical assumptions and specific political interpretations and judgments ... but presented as self-evident facts. Furthermore, these

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¹ This brief strategy paper and urgent policy intervention is motivated by the exigencies of non-governmental or 'civil society' engagement with South African policy-makers and strategic analysts in the specific circumstances of the lead-up to the Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference due to take place in Hong Kong, 13-18 December 2005.

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