

# Protests as Bush arrives in Brazil

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**WASHINGTON** --Thousands of Brazilian protesters clashed with police as President Bush arrived in Brazil Thursday in a trip aimed at portraying the United States as a caring ally in the face of a resurgent populist movement in some nations.

In Sao Paulo, students, environmentalists and left-wing Brazilians protested Bush's arrival. Greenpeace activists decried the U.S.-Brazilian plan to promote ethanol more because it could enrich foreign investors and local business interests rather than poor farmers.

Protesters scrawled, "Get out, Bush! Assassin!" near the streets where Bush is expected to drive by and police clashed with around 6,000 protesters, according to The Associated Press.

This is President Bush's eighth trip to Latin America -- more than any other president in U.S. history -- but Bush has battled a perception that his administration is either distracted by bigger problems in the Middle East or out to push its own interests to the detriment of the region's legions of poor people.

"The trip really is to remind people that we care," Bush told the CNN Spanish-language network Wednesday.

Bush has no official activities planned until Friday, when he will visit a facility at the state-owned Petrobras oil company and deliver a joint statement on biofuel technologies.

Afterward, he is scheduled to have lunch with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a socialist who has pursued orthodox economic policies and is touted by U.S. officials as a kind of left-wing government with whom the administration can have close relations. The two countries are planning a joint initiative to promote the use of ethanol in third countries.

Bush's agenda is padded with events aimed at showcasing how U.S. aid and free trade are helping Latin Americans improve their lot. U.S. officials say that under Bush the administration has increased aid to Latin America, pushed debt forgiveness for the region's poorest countries and

that U.S. residents and companies provide many billions more in remittances and investments.

But even so, many of the news headlines highlight targeted gestures by U.S. foe Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, like an agreement to jointly issue \$1.5 billion in bonds with Argentina. And Democrats have criticized Bush for requesting a 9 percent cut in aid to Latin America in the 2008 budget request.

Chávez is flying to Buenos Aires to meet with President Néstor Kirchner and address an anti-Bush rally Friday, coinciding with Bush's arrival in nearby Uruguay. About 40,000 are expected to attend the event at a local stadium, but organizers were dealt a setback when Bolivian President Evo Morales, a left-wing indigenous leader, cited logistical reasons for not participating.

National Security Advisor Steve Hadley was not concerned about what Chávez might say in Buenos Aires.

"The President is going to do what he's been doing for a long time," he told reporters traveling with the president on Air Force One, "Talk about a positive agenda, that we want to help; his vision for Latin America, which is the vision of Latin Americans for themselves."

Some groups have also taken to the streets in Colombia, the U.S.' closest ally in the hemisphere. Besides Brazil, Bush is to visit Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. He returns to Washington on Wednesday.