

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / US special counsel to investigate Biden's son Hunter

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This is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service.

I'm Andrew Peach and in the early hours of Saturday the 12th of August, these are our main stories. The US Attorney General has given a federal prosecutor extra powers to investigate President Joe Biden's son Hunter over allegations of improper business dealings overseas. Police in Brazil have searched the homes of four people connected to the former President Jair Bolsonaro as part of an investigation into alleged fraud. The authorities in Hawaii have begun partially reopening a town on the island of Maui that's been devastated by wildfires. Also in this podcast, state authorities in California have approved the expansion of driverless taxi services in San Francisco. I have not taken one, I actually called one the other week. But what happened next will find out later in the Global News podcast. First, the prosecutor who filed criminal charges against President Biden's son Hunter has been given the additional powers of a United States special counsel.

David Weiss will now investigate whether Hunter Biden engaged in improper business dealings. Mr Weiss was appointed to the role as special counsel by the US Attorney General, Merrick Garland. As special counsel, he will continue to have the authority and responsibility that he has previously exercised to oversee the investigation and decide where, when and whether to file charges.

The move comes as Republicans in Congress threaten an impeachment inquiry into allegations that President Biden benefited from his son's business ventures in Ukraine and China. More from our correspondent in Washington, Nomia Iqbal.

It's extraordinary really because basically it means that this years-long inquiry into Hunter Biden has entered this really unpredictable stage. So David Weiss was appointed by Donald Trump when

he was president and when Joe Biden became president, he never removed Weiss. He allowed him to continue with the investigation. And basically what it means now is that David Weiss can essentially expand the case. And I think there will be questions on why did he agree to this plea deal that Hunter Biden entered, it fell apart last month, and it was on pretty narrow charges.

Hunter Biden was accused of lying on a gun form, late filing of taxes. So does David Weiss want to go for bigger charges against the president's only living son? We just don't know. And I also think this is worth remembering that it's a stunning U-turn because originally claims that Weiss was going to be made a special prosecutor was rejected by him and it was rejected by the Attorney General

Merrick Garland who made the announcement. And so we're in this sort of weird kind of limbo I guess

in which this plea deal has fallen apart. We don't know exactly where this investigation will go. It gives the special prosecutor more powers to investigate more things. And it could be, and I emphasise could, that Hunter Biden may possibly face a criminal indictment and a trial. That's the sort of, you know, that's the way in which a special prosecutor has been elevated.

And what listeners around the world might be thinking is these allegations have been around and discussed and prominent for years, long before Joe Biden became president. Why is the process taking so long? It's interesting, isn't it? Because, yes, Hunter Biden was brought up during the 2016 election campaign. If you remember one of the, I think it was the first presidential debate between President Biden, rather than candidate Joe Biden and Donald Trump, Hunter Biden came up.

And it, you know, arguably you could say it was one of Joe Biden's most, you know, well-known moments or liked moments by the electorate when he defended his son. Because there are lots of Americans that can relate to someone who has a troubled son. And Hunter Biden is troubled. It's very well known. Hunter Biden himself has been very public about his battles with alcohol and with drugs. But for the Republicans, the Republican party, certainly the right-wing media here, nothing fires them up more than Hunter Biden. And, you know, what he's done as a lobbyist, a consultant and a lawyer, there's evidence of, they say, of corruption. There's dealings, especially with Ukraine and China. And they think there are implications for President Biden. Hunter Biden denies all of this. President Biden denies all of this. And so this investigation is ongoing. And I guess, you know, this is probably President Biden's way of saying, look, I'm not above the law. I will allow these investigations to go on. The Department of Justice is impartial and doesn't want to get in the way of the work that they're doing.

Our correspondent, Namia Iqbal, with me from Washington. Federal police agents in Brazil have searched the homes of four individuals linked to the former President Jair Bolsonaro. This is part of an investigation into alleged embezzlement and money laundering.

Police seized items, including computers and documents belonging to three military officers and one of Mr. Bolsonaro's lawyers. Here's Leonardo Rosha.

Police say Mr. Bolsonaro appropriated at least \$1 million worth of official gifts, given to him by fellow leaders while he was president. Among the items which went missing from the government inventory were expensive jewelry and sculptures. Four individuals are said to have sold or attempted to sell the items for cash on his behalf. The former president denies any wrongdoing. He says he's the victim of political persecution by Brazil's left-wing government, which has been in power since January. Officials in Hawaii beginning to allow people to return to the town of Lahaina, which has been almost entirely destroyed by wildfires. Only those with proof of residency or a hotel reservation are being permitted to enter. At least 55 people are known to have died on the island of Maui, with many more still missing. The Governor of Hawaii, Josh Green, warned the number of dead could rise. We know that many people are suffering. The fatality numbers will climb somewhat today. Everyone, love your neighbors, support them, because this is devastating for Maui. We probably have well over a thousand buildings that have been destroyed. Many, many hundreds of families have been displaced. We'll rebuild. The president has already, just in six hours, authorized and approved our request for emergency support, but it's going to be a long haul. One insurance firm said damage to homes and businesses in Lahaina would make losses run into hundreds of millions of dollars. Emerson Timmins lives just outside the town. After the worst of the fire died down, he cycled through the heart of Lahaina in order to get to his family 30 kilometers away. And this is what he saw. Starting from one end to the other, it's absolutely gone. So you go from a thriving tropical sort of paradise old quaint little town with little mom and pop shops, palm trees, swaying in the breeze, and everything looks perfect one day. And literally the next day, it looks like a war zone. It looks like somebody

came in there and blew it up. Everything's on fire and everything's ashes. And it's almost like you're in a dream. And I had firsthand accounts from people that did escape. And they said, friends they knew got out with no clothes. The next thing though, their house was on fire. They ran out their door and didn't have time to put shoes or clothes on. They were running for their lives. Other people didn't have time to get their pets. They barely got out with their family. Others didn't get out and their families didn't make it. Emerson Timmins, resident of Maui in Hawaii. Ukraine has sacked the heads of military recruitment for every region in the country, amid concerns about corruption. President Vladimir Zelensky said there were signs officials had enriched themselves illegally. Mr Zelensky said in some cases officials had helped to transport men out of Ukraine to avoid being drafted. The head of the Supreme Court and the head of military recruitment in Odessa had been arrested. President Zelensky also recommended that the army select replacements who have battlefield experience, saying those serving in Ukraine's military deserve more. We are dismissing all regional military commissioners. This system should be run by people who know exactly what war is, why cynicism and bribery at a time of war, is high treason. Instead, soldiers who've been through the front line, who cannot be in the trenches because they're in poor health, lost their limbs, but have retained their dignity and have no cynicism, they can be entrusted with this recruitment system. Tatiana Shepchuk is a lawyer working for the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Kiev. Julian Marshall asked her for more details on what kind of corrupt practices have been going on. These conscription offices were not properly reformed. It was inheritance of the Soviet Union. The reform only started a few months before the full-scale invasion. Naturally, these conscription offices were a huge source of bureaucracy, untransparent procedures, and frankly speaking, corruption, that just people were paying bribes not to be mobilized to the front lines. In the first months of the full-scale invasion, people just closed their eyes on the problem because there were other priorities. But recently, a huge scandal erupted in Odessa region. The journalist found that the head of this regional conscription office, he bought a mansion in Spain and then a soldier started to check in him and his relatives, and they found that the entire wealth of the family is around 5 million euros of unexplained assets. Of course, now when Ukrainians perceive corruption as a huge threat to national security, people frankly say that corruption is something like a trident for them during the wartime, and especially in the conscription offices because it's naturally the question of life and death for so many people. The general public was outraged what was going on. Therefore, the central government had to act, and they started to investigate Odessa regional conscription offices and center and others, and disclosed a lot of problems. But is the implication that all of these conscription centers were guilty of corruption, and why is everyone being dismissed? The perception is that most of them are corrupt, and the idea Zelensky has and the general staff they have is to change the leadership to put their officers who had recent battlefield experience. So in a way, it's not just dismissing the all corrupt people, but putting on the place people from the front lines. The lawyer Tatiana Shevchuk from the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Kiev. The number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to get to Europe has doubled in the past year, according to official estimates. 89,000 people made the crossing between North Africa and Italy in just seven months. The European Union's border agency, Frontex, believes the number will remain high because

criminal gangs are now offering low prices for migrants to make these journeys.

Sofia Batitsa reports from Rome. The number of people caught making irregular border crossings into the EU has not been this high in the first half of the year since 2016. The main route migrants are taking is known as the Central Mediterranean route across the Mediterranean Sea between North Africa and Italy. Tunisia's eastern coast has overtaken neighboring Libya as the region's main point of departure. Frontex says a large number of people come from Egypt, Guinea and Ivory Coast, fleeing war and persecution. The crossing is one of the most dangerous in the

world for migrants. So far this year, more than 2000 people have thought to have died in the Mediterranean. And this week, 41 people lost their lives after their boats sank near the Italian island of Lampedusa. But Frontex predicts that these deaths won't stop others from making the journey. It says there is fierce competition among criminal groups, which means that smugglers are offering lower prices. The fear is that many more migrants will die trying to reach Europe for a better life. Now, soon you might be at a hail a driverless taxi in California with just a few taps of your mobile phone. This after the authorities approved the expansion of such a service in San Francisco. Two operators, Waymo and Cruz, have now been allowed to run fully commercial so-called robo taxi services in the city 24 seven. San Francisco first introduced driverless cars in 2014 with a mandatory human safety driver on board. Currently, it's only a limited service, but they hope to expand to other cities in the US. Stephen Council is a tech reporter from SF Gate, a digital outlet in San Francisco. He told me what these driverless taxis look like. They are very similar to regular cars, but they do have, you know, some hallmarks of 21st century technology for sure. They have this sort of creepy quietness that electric cars often have. And then they also have instruments on the top of the cars, sort of spinning cameras that act as radar systems that, you know, let them see the entire surroundings of the street and operate without anyone driving in the front seat. It's pretty startling to see them every time, even though living in San Francisco, I've seen hundreds now. So they're obviously using sat-nav technology

to know where they're going, and then they're using technology attached to the vehicles to make sure they don't hit anything. That's right. It's all very camera focused. I think there were things in the works in the past to try to make it very, you know, GPS oriented, but modern day autonomous vehicles really use these cameras and radars on the top because they know that they're going to have to be, you know, lightning fast at avoiding pedestrians, bicyclists, other vehicles, and navigating through a very dense and busy city in San Francisco. And they must work otherwise they wouldn't be allowed to expand like this. How do people feel about them though? Are people happy to get in these vehicles and get from A to B using them, feeling safe? They do work and there has not been any fatalities from crashes, which is a big selling point for the companies up to this point at the meeting yesterday, where the commission in California okayed the expansion of fared vehicle rides by these two companies. Though dozens and dozens of San Francisco residents spoke out against the expansion, calling on complaints made by the fire department in San Francisco, as well as the municipal transportation authorities about cars getting in the way of first responders in the streets, slowing down and stopping when police cars are coming, and just not really knowing quite how to act in emergency situations. That's interesting. So there are there are still a list of objections, if you like, of situations that they're not sophisticated enough to respond properly to. Yeah, that's right. You know, there's also worries about more traffic in

San Francisco, you know, taking away taxi drivers and Uber driver's jobs. But I think some of the main complaints so far have been those ones with first responders and emergency situations. And does it feel as though we're just going to see more and more of this, you know, expanding across towns and cities in California, and then across the rest of the US and then across the rest of the world? These cars have massive corporate backing. I mean, the two companies that just got okayed yesterday are owned by General Motors, which is one of the biggest American car manufacturers

and Google. So these companies have billions of dollars to pour into these two sort of startups, and they're just going to keep growing. Are they cheaper than a taxi? Right now, they're about the same price as an Uber and a Lyft. But these companies are losing huge amounts of money in the development of these cars. So it's unclear how much they actually cost to operate.

And presumably taxi drivers, taxi firms are beyond the list of people objecting.

There were lots of taxi drivers at the meeting yesterday speaking out against the, you know, pros of having a human driver in your car and speaking out against the driverless cars proliferating across the city. Have you taken one yourself? I have not taken one. I actually called one the other week, and it was approaching me and then it canceled. And I thought, well, there's no human driver to cancel this ride. What's happened? So it canceled you? Well, we don't know why. Maybe it was because I'm a journalist.

Stephen Council, who's a tech reporter in San Francisco. Still to come.

Cool Herk is revered as the founder of Hip Hop, the springboard, the big bang moment, they say.

It's 50 years since Hip Hop was born at a back to school party in the Bronx in New York.

Do you ever feel a bit overwhelmed when you check the news on your phone first thing in the morning? Whenever I open up my phone, they're just endless warnings of more extreme weather to

come. I'm Hannah. I'm the presenter of a new podcast called What in the World from the BBC World Service. We're going to be here trying to help you make sense of the world around you so you can feel a little bit better about what's happening in the world.

You can find What in the World wherever you get your BBC podcasts.

Welcome back to the Global News Podcast. The UN says five of its security staff who were kidnapped

in Yemen 18 months ago have been freed. Yemen's been devastated by civil war since 2014, though much of the fighting has recently subsided. The UN resident and humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, David Gressley, said the release of the five staff was great news.

I'm pleased to report that they're unharmed in good health and good spirits. I had a chance to speak with them, obviously, on the way back. I'm very much impressed by not only their good spirits, but the strength that they have exhibited under extraordinary circumstances.

Let's get more on this from Mike Thompson.

It's clear from the comments of one of the five security staff, reportedly kidnapped by Al Qaeda, that their experiences were deeply traumatic.

Akam Safyol Anam, a former army lieutenant colonel from Bangladesh, has described his experiences as horrifying. He said he didn't see the sky for months and lived with the fear of death every day. The terror he added can't be expressed in words and is only seen in films.

Soon after arriving back in Dhaka, he told reporters he never thought he'd come home.

Next to Niger and hundreds of supporters of the coup leaders in the country held a demonstration

on Friday near a French military base on the outskirts of the capital, Niameh. Protesters shouted slogans against the former colonial power in Niger, as well as the regional bloc, ECOWAS. France has about 1,500 military personnel in the country who were helping to combat jihadist insurgents. On Thursday, ECOWAS ordered the activation of a standby force to go into Niger to restore constitutional order. Africa regional editor Richard Hamilton considers what could happen next. Military intervention appears to be edging closer.

We still don't know what it might look like, or even when a regional force might go into action. But the ECOWAS commissioner for political affairs, Abdul Fattah Musa, said an element of uncertainty is necessary. Any time from now, the force could be deployed. And for operational reasons, we have to maintain a strategic ambiguity when we are going to deploy the force. If the Junta in Niger decides between now and the deployment that they are ready to talk and they are ready to restore constitutional order, then we will pause in preparation for deployment. Nigeria has the most powerful voice within ECOWAS and its president, has argued in favour of a force going in. But Beatrice de Leon Kobo, an analyst specialising in conflict in the Sahel, says a war in Niger could have catastrophic consequences. I think, unfortunately, if there is a military intervention, it's going to run out of control. No one wants to come to this point. Nobody, not the neighbours, not the Junta, Nigeria, nobody wants a war in West Africa. Because we need to understand it's not all the countries of ECOWAS against Niger Junta. It's that Burkina Faso and Mali will support the CNSP. This could be very dangerous. And unfortunately, I don't think this is something that any of the military could really do at this moment, because they are already in war, most of these countries against Jihadism. So I fear this is only going to create more losses of civilians, and especially that the violent extremism groups, Jihadis and criminal organisations are going to thrive in this chaos. And that's going to be terrible for the future of West Africa.

The coup leaders maintain that they stepped in because of the deteriorating security situation in the country. But under President Bazoum, things were actually improving. Now, Africa Confidential,

a newsletter that provides analysis about the continent, suggests that other motives may also have been at play. It says that when the previous president, Mahamadou Isufu, was in power, nearly half the defence budget, more than \$125 million, were diverted into private hands. And just when officials were reopening their inquiries into individuals linked to that scandal, President Bazoum was overthrown. The coup leader, Abdurrahman Chiani, was the head of the presidential guard

under Mahamadou Isufu. And it was reported that the new president was about to sack him. The Norwegian mountaineer, Kristin Harila, has denied accusations. Her team climbed over an injured guide who later died during a bid to break a world record. The porter, named as Mohammed Hassan, had fallen off a ledge on K2 in Pakistan, the world's second highest mountain. Here's Bethany Bell.

Two climbers, Philip Flamie from Germany and Wilhelm Steindl from Austria, say they have drone footage

which appears to show people climbing over Mohammed Hassan on an extremely narrow path on the mountain

side. The pair, who were filming a documentary, were also on the mountain that day, but had

cancelled their ascent because of dangerous weather conditions. As their camera display was small, they say they saw the details of what their drone captured only the next day.

But in a statement on Instagram, Kristin Harila said she and her team had tried everything to help Mr Hassan, who was part of a separate team in dangerous conditions. She denied accusations that Mr Hassan had been left to die. Ms Harila said no one was to blame for his death, adding she decided to make the statement to stop the spread of what she called misinformation and hatred.

Now football, the England men's captain Harry Kane, is in Germany, where he's expected to finalise his transfer from Tottenham Hotspur to Bayern Munich. The two clubs have agreed to fear more than \$109 million for Tottenham's record goal scorer. From Munich, here's Joe Inwood. He is Tottenham's talismanic striker and England's captain. Harry Kane's been with Spurs for 19 years.

Now at the age of 30, that looks all but certain to change. It's long been rumoured that Harry Kane wanted to leave north London and a club where his prodigious talent had never been rewarded with

silverware. At Bayern Munich, trophies are all but guaranteed. Outside the Allianz Arena, fans were excited about the arrival of a new number nine. He's an international player who knows the game and who's very skilled, so he can only prove the team. So looking forward to seeing him playing.

So I'm excited, but last year Mane didn't go as we planned, so we'll see, but I hope, hopefully.

I think German club is proud to take one of the best English soccer players. That's big for Germany, I think, yeah. That joy in Germany will mirror the despondency in north London,

where they have lost undoubtedly their best player just hours before the start of the new season.

The Spurs manager, Ange Postecoglou, knew a deal was imminent.

From that perspective, it gives us some clarity, almost something else. What's

happened is that we're moving forward and certainly with training today and preparing for

Brentford, we're doing it without Harry. As for Bayern, they start their season with a cup clash

against RB Leipzig. It seems unlikely Harry Kane will arrive in time for that, but with his talent, expect one of England's greatest ever strikers to quickly make his mark on the Bundesliga.

Joe Inwood in Germany. 50 years ago yesterday on the 11th of August 1973, the music genre hip hop was born at a back-to-school party in an apartment building in the Bronx in New York.

The DJ Clive Campbell, known as Cool Herk, used two turntables to isolate and repeat instrumental breaks in tracks by the likes of James Brown and Curtis Mayfield. He mixed between

them to create a continuous flow of music. It's grown to influence pretty much everything from politics to culture, language to fashion, and it's created legends like Grandmaster Flash,

Rondi MC and Missy Elliott. The broadcaster and DJ Trevor Nelson delves into the origins of hip hop.

Cool Herk is revered as the founder of hip hop. The springboard, the big bang moment they say,

basically is the DJ who took a beat from a record and extended that beat by playing the same beat on another turntable and extending it. To make it simple, if you imagine Queen

another one bites the dust, the beginning of that. Imagine that with no vocal

and somebody extends the beginning again so it just keeps going around like an instrumental.

Or if somebody said another one bites the dust and then he just spun it back and said another

one but you know it just extended. That basically, as simple as that is, is the essence of DJ turntablism

and hip hop. Hip hop is more than just a form of music. It's easy to say it's rap or hip hop, isn't it? It's not. It's a lifestyle. It really was. It still is.

In poor parts of America, especially in the city of New York, Hispanics and Blacks, were at the lowest rung of their ladder. Do you know what I mean? Entertainment for them would have been hanging out on the street, throwing little block parties. Being anything to entertain themselves because they didn't have the money to go to posh places. I think that was the driving force of hip hop. That's why hip hop became this cultural phenomenon and it wasn't just about the music. It was the dancing. It was the graffiti. There were several elements to hip hop and that is what hip hop is. People get confused with what hip hop is. That is hip hop. The culture is turntablism,

graffiti and dancing. Well, I first encountered hip hop as a young young man when I heard Rappers Delight and I thought, my gosh, that is the most amazing, fun song I've ever heard in my life. And I think a lot of people thought it was a one hit wonder. It was just one of those novelty records. For me, it became serious when Grandmaster Flash and a few years before I've released a tune a few years later called The Message. It struck me. It hit me on the head like a mallet. Lyrically, it was, I've never forgotten the lyrics of that song. Don't push me because I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head. It's like a jungle sometimes. It makes me wonder how I keep from going under. It's like a jungle sometimes. It makes me wonder how I keep from going under. And it's about the struggle living in the hood. Those two records sum up where hip hop was going to go. Party, braggadocious, flashy, ghetto, fabulous, jewellery, escapism, aspiration, and politics, reality, truth, my struggle. And those have been the two mainstays of hip hop since that day. Trevor Nelson on the origins of hip hop. And that's all from us for now. There will be a new edition of Global News to download later. If you'd like to comment on this podcast, drop us an email. The address is globalpodcast at bbc.co.uk. You'll also find us on Twitter where we are at Global News Pod. This edition was mixed by Alicia Thurston. The producer was Lea McChefrey. The editor is Karen Martin. My name is Andrew

Peach. Thanks for listening. And until next time, goodbye.