The final years of the War of American Independence created new possibilities for the Habsburg Monarchy. In the Austrian Netherlands, Ostend flourished in the later years of the conflict as the only neutral port in northwestern Europe. The influx of foreign ships and investments carried with them new prospects for local firms and business. Trading opportunities, which had been impossible due to the British monopoly before then, now became reality as Habsburg firms reaped the benefits of supplying the Caribbean and North American markets for the first time. For as long as peace remained elusive, profit would continue. Elsewhere in the Habsburg Monarchy, merchants desired the same fortunes. Traders and bankers in the city of Trieste, the major Habsburg free port in the northern Adriatic, clamoured for a share in trade. Many of them attempted to create the first direct trading routes between Trieste and the North American mainland. In doing so, their profits rivalled those of the imperial expeditions to India and China. Overall, private enterprise and economic expansion in the Habsburg Monarchy benefitted greatly from the disruption of the American Revolution and the prospect of an independent United States.

New political challenges and opportunities also emerged for the Habsburgs during the War of American Independence. In 1779, the Habsburgs suffered a humiliating conclusion to the War of the Bavarian Succession, which thwarted Joseph II’s designs on Bavaria and heralded a Prussian victory within the eyes of European powers. Co-mediation of the Peace of Teschen assured the Russians the prestige of arbiter of the Holy Roman Empire. Relations between the Habsburgs and France waned as a result of French participation in the peace process. For the Habsburgs, the War of American Independence offered the possibility to correct this humiliation in failing to secure Bavaria. Maria Theresa dreamed of bringing...
about a general peace within Europe, and State Chancellor Prince von Kaunitz and Joseph II worked tirelessly to realise this aim after her death. Chasing a conclusion to the American Revolutionary war, therefore, took precedence over the economic advantages presented by its continuance. At stake was a restoration of dynastic pride, an opportunity to control the fortunes of Europe, and the chance to inflict painful revenge upon the French and Prussians. Yet few today recall Maria Theresa’s dying dream of peace or Kaunitz’s longed-for Congress of Vienna which, had it come to pass, would have supplanted Paris as the diplomatic birthplace of a recognised United States of America.

“**We Must Bide Our Time**” – Ostend and the Atlantic

Across Europe, merchants vied for new commercial opportunities occasioned by the War of American Independence. Nowhere was this rush more present than in the port of Ostend. As the only neutral port on the European mainland at the ligature between the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean, Ostend’s mercantile classes benefitted immensely from the conflict. British raids first brought French merchants to Ostend to protect their vessels under the neutral imperial ensign. Dutch merchants followed suit during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. Between 1778 and 1780, Ostenders witnessed an almost seven-fold increase in the number of ships using their harbour. Exports to the British Isles, where British merchants also utilised imperial neutrality for their vessels to the Caribbean, soared in same period: Ostend-England trade more than doubled by 1780 whilst exports to Scotland rose from virtually nothing to £45,803 in 1781 and doubled in 1782. The meteoric rise of Ostend as a commercial entrepôt arose from two main factors, both of which were influenced by the American Revolution. First, Ostenders supplied munitions to belligerents owing to its neutrality and proximity to Liège, one of the largest munition manufactories in eighteenth-century Europe; and secondly, masking ships under imperial colours and ownership protected against foreign infractions at sea. Throughout the American Revolution, Ostend was an indispensable port of call for all warring powers.

The independent Prince-Bishopric of Liège was the source of Ostend’s tremendous success during the Revolution. The capital Liège, as well as the towns and hamlets in the environs surrounding the city, bisected the Austrian Netherlands and were a manufacturing hub for small arms, rifles, muskets, bayonets, and occasionally cannons. Powder mills, nail factories, and rifling workshops signified the town’s way of life. Along the Vesdre River alone, forty different workshops carved out barrels for rifles. The region produced 240,000 guns on
average per year for export abroad. All belligerents sourced weapons from Liège. The thirteen American colonies were the most in need. They suffered from the lack of powder mills and ammunition producers in general. Consequently, procuring arms became a major patriot priority. In little more than two months in 1775, the Committee of Safety in Pennsylvania spent nearly £25,000 procuring necessary weapons for their militia. This was excellent news for Liège—and for Ostend. Benjamin Franklin, as a Pennsylvanian agent, fulfilled orders with weapons from Liège and before long, he received unsolicited samples and promises from Liègeois manufacturers hoping for a “channel of arms for the Free States of America.”

The completion of the system of canals and roadways connecting Liège with Ostend on the eve of the Revolution allowed for easy transportation of the munitions, especially after the Dutch prohibited military exports. Initial arms traffic between Liège and North America took a circuitous route via Lisbon. British, French, and Habsburg agents in the Portuguese capital tracked the consignments destined for North America. In 1776, the Mayor of Liège declared, “our traders, great and small, are giving work to our men; we see nothing but crates of guns in the streets.” Liège’s bustling streets in 1776 actually represented a low point of munitions exports. In subsequent years, an extraordinary amount of weaponry transited the Austrian Netherlands to supply the War of American Independence. By the end of the war, Ostend had shipped around two million pounds of munitions. The War of American Independence turned the region into a profitable powder keg.

From 1781 until the end of the war, Ostend was the only neutral port along the northwestern European coastline. The maritime convention of “neutral ships made neutral goods” protected any ships sailing under the Habsburg flag. Ostend merchants offered to “neutralise” foreign vessels through use of the flag. This “neutralisation” trade operated in several ways. The simplest measures involved ships entering Ostend where goods would be unloaded and then reloaded, which involved new cargo papers stating the goods came from the Austrian Netherlands. English ships utilised this method extensively through so-called “Algerian passports” obtained at Ostend, which cleared any cargo heading past the Iberian Peninsula irrespective of the destination. The other method involved re-registering ownership whereby Ostend merchants took ownership of a vessel in name only. The owners were neutral, but the ship, captain, and cargo remained the de facto property of foreigners. These “paper” companies operated through merchants in the Austrian Netherlands who acted as commissioners for large international syndicates. But foreign merchants also relocated to Ostend or
established shell companies to reap the same benefit. Merchants from Dunkirk were the first wave of such competitors. One Dunkirk trader, François de Vinck, masked a fleet of 157 ships. His company De Vinck & Co. became the major commissioner for European traders to the Atlantic during the Revolution.¹¹

Neutralising ships and masking ownership became so prevalent that a new verb emerged: Ostendisieren (to Ostendize).¹² This process precipitated an explosion of ship traffic around Ostend. From 1780 to 1783, between 6,000 and 9,000 ships entered Ostend. This was a remarkable increase from the roughly 480 ships which entered each year from 1775 to 1778.¹³ In 1782, over fifty foreign firms registered their operations in Ostend and the entirety of the Dunkirk fishing fleet had swapped their flag for the imperial one. Ostend authorities issued 1,944 passports that year and the Admiralty granted firms 268 new passes between 1781 and 1783. The rise was so great that the walls of Ostend had to be torn down and a new neighbourhood and harbour facilities constructed.¹⁴ The American Revolution ushered in an era of considerable economic growth for Ostend and the Austrian Netherlands.

The growth in trade volume increased Ostend’s Atlantic connections. New trade avenues opened in the West Indies where the British, Danish, Dutch, French, and Swedish sought to supply their colonies through the neutral imperial flag. In 1782 alone, 126 ships listed the Greater Antilles as their destination in the Gazette van Gent. From 1778 until 1785, a constant flow of ships travelled between Ostend and the Caribbean.¹⁵ British traders maintained vital supplies of gin, tea, and tobacco from Caribbean plantations to London by migrating to Ostend. In 1781, a government report noted how, on a single day, 68,970 pounds of tea arrived in London from Ostend.¹⁶ Ostend’s merchants even encompassed slave traders. Friedrich Romberg became one of the most successful in this trade in the Austrian Netherlands.¹⁷ Romberg first sought to capitalise on the burgeoning munitions trade to America under his new maritime company Romberg Fils & Ricour in Ostend but his request to transport arms to St. Thomas was denied by the authorities in 1782.¹⁸ Romberg expanded his fleet, with almost half of his 327 ships under ownership by established merchants in the Austrian Netherlands.¹⁹ He then founded a maritime insurance company in Bruges and founded two further companies to enter the slave trade; Romberg & Cie in Ghent, which focused on forced transportation to Cuba and Saint-Domingue, and Romberg, Bapst & Cie at Bordeaux with a German financier and help from Brussels-based bankers, which Romberg fronted through his son Henry. This firm rose to become one of the major slaving houses in France.²⁰ The Ghent-based branch sent ten ships from Ostend in 1782 destined for Angola and West Africa.²¹
ennobled Romberg in 1784 for his pioneering efforts, but it was the American Revolution to which Romberg owed his success.\textsuperscript{22}

Whilst connections between Ostend and the Atlantic embedded trade links with the Caribbean, fewer merchants dared to enter the warzone directly around mainland America. Direct trade between the United States and Ostend only occurred towards the close of the war, when safer passage seemed assured. Ostend merchants were eager to start, however. John Fottrell, one of the longstanding Irish merchants in Ostend, exemplified this cautious excitement. Fottrell planned to send a ship, \textit{De Stad Weenen}, under imperial colours to Philadelphia but feared an American ban on British products. He solicited Franklin for advice before he continued.\textsuperscript{23} Franklin could not help Fottrell against the importation ban, but he did provide a list of wares and contacts in the United States.\textsuperscript{24} In his letter to Franklin, Fottrell explained how trade with the United States was a matter of particular interest for local Ostend magistrates. “In consequence of orders from Government,” Fottrell noted, the local authorities wished for him to “acquaint all my friends” with Franklin’s information so that “every encouragement and facility that can be desired will be granted to the American trade here.”\textsuperscript{25}

Fottrell’s successful trade with the United States spread among Ostend merchants.\textsuperscript{26} Franklin received numerous petitions from them in quick succession. In late January 1783, Jean-Guild Wets, a merchant at Bruges, wrote on behalf of a consortium “composed of fourty of the most Substantial marchants of Flandres [sic],” desiring direct trade with the United States.\textsuperscript{27} The next day, on January 31, another representative of \textit{Veuve d’Aubremé & Fils} from Brussels wrote on the occasion of “a striking and glorious Epoch in the Annals of the Century” and begged of him to send a list of contacts in Boston and Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{28} A few days later, an Irish firm based in Dunkirk and Ostend, \textit{Connelly Sons & Arthur}, informed Franklin of their plan to divert ships from the West Indies towards Boston, Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York with linens in exchange for tobacco. They also asked to become American consuls and included a portfolio of ten references from American and European merchants.\textsuperscript{29}

Administrators in the Austrian Netherlands were keen to oversee the continuation of profiteering from the American Revolution. When the first wave of emigrant merchants came to trade out of Ostend following the French entry into the war in 1778, Prince Georg Adam von Starhemberg, the minister plenipotentiary in Brussels, ordered the Council of Finance to start preparing suggestions for how to develop a market presence in North America.\textsuperscript{30} The short memorandum, submitted by Councillor Denis-Benoît, baron de Cazier, argued American commerce would benefit the Austrian Netherlands but the merchants
would organise this themselves. Starhemberg expected more, especially on the prospects for direct trade, so he proposed that the treasurer general have it more “thoughtfully debated” at the Council of Finance. In the meantime, he forwarded the memorandum to Kaunitz as “a work of foresight.” Kaunitz’s response was muted.31 Unlike Starhemberg, he was more aware of the perilous state of neutrality since Lee visited Vienna at the same time Starhemberg forced these discussions. Kaunitz thought any advances by Brussels towards the Americans would undermine their neutral position, so he ignored further discussion.32 But Starhemberg did not relent. After further deliberation with his councillors, he urged enticements for American traders in order to stimulate business.33 Pressed again by Starhemberg, Kaunitz acquiesced at the end of October 1778 but he limited Starhemberg’s actions to merely pursuing a commercial relationship with the Americans, nothing political.34

Starhemberg felt dissatisfied with his remit and over the next few years, he pushed its limits. For a time, he pursued a channel to Franklin through Jan Ingenhousz, but this plan failed due to Ingenhousz’s sojourn to London.35 Kaunitz would not countenance any overtures to the dozens of Americans living in the Austrian Netherlands so Starhemberg turned instead to the consul in Bordeaux for ideas, but nothing came of it.36 By 1781, the conversation had no clear direction without accepting a political connection via representation and a treaty of commerce.

The issue seemed more urgent than ever following the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War and the highpoint of Ostend’s commercial influence. Profits ran so high that it was inconceivable and impractical to relinquish it. Franklin’s indirect response to the legal dispute over the Eersten case in the American courts seemed to offer a solution. In his letter on the matter, Franklin pointed out that legal representation could be ensured through a consul general, who “might at all times assist his compatriots with his Counsels and Protection in any Affairs they might have in that Country.”37 Ministers in Brussels interpreted this as an invitation to send a consul but without requiring a treaty or recognition. On March 24, 1782, the Council of Finance met in Brussels to discuss Franklin’s idea.38 Their lengthy memorandum considered the logistical ramifications of such an undertaking, but unanimously agreed a consul general should be established, since it would provide “useful information” and could “support the general interests of commerce and direct the speculations of traders in the various provinces of the monarchy.” In conclusion, they envisaged a grand system of several vice-consuls “given the scope of the United Colonies”; one for each American state, under the direction of a Consul General, a “learned man”
from the mercantile class who “would be the means by which the government, either here [in Brussels] or in Vienna, would gather good information on the local circumstances [in America], especially in relation to trade.” Starhemberg approved the council’s measure and sent it to Kaunitz for deliberation with the emperor. His adjoining comment, however, highlighted the problem of recognition which was inherent in establishing any formal consular network. Starhemberg sensed Franklin’s plan was “to get our Court to recognise the Independence of the United Colonies” which he felt unable to recommend “as long as the fate of the Colonies remains undecided.” On April 13, 1782, Kaunitz discussed the recommendations in an audience with the emperor and afterwards replied to Starhemberg. Kaunitz agreed to the necessity of a consul for ensuring the future trade with the United States but he could not allow any appointment to occur since it risked ruining his role as a mediator. “We must first bide our time,” Kaunitz argued, “until we will see what the fate of the colonies will be.”

The Peace that Would Have Been

May 13, 1779, is not a date well remembered by historians of the American Revolution, but it should be. The Peace of Teschen sealed the fate of Central Europe on that day, bringing an end to the War of the Bavarian Succession and preventing any European war from distracting the Atlantic powers. British dreams of a German confrontation which would sap French resources had not materialised and thus the aim of forcing France to fight on multiple fronts vanished. Joseph II’s hopes were also dashed. His plan to exchange the Austrian Netherlands for the Bavarian territories had been thwarted under the terms of the treaty. His recompense was a sliver of land called the Innviertel, now incorporated into the Archduchy of Austria above the Enns. Joseph and his ministers had spent nearly 100 million florins in financing the war. The 2,200 square kilometres of the Innviertel was a bitter and meagre compensation in return.

May 1779 influenced the course of the American Revolution in another way, too. In her customary note of thanks to the co-mediators of the peace, Maria Theresa offered the same service to bring about peace between the French King Louis and King George in the War of American Independence. The offer of mediation to an ally who had just arbitrated a humiliating peace seemed a strange act. A bemused French ambassador Breteuil certainly thought so. He outlined his suspicions to ministers in Paris, believing the Habsburgs sought to humble the French and to extract a warmer relationship with Britain at France’s
expensive. The French decided inaction was the best course and simply chose to ignore the polite suggestion. A cordial remark maybe, but Maria Theresa had made the offer with sincerity. It was a sentiment she expressed to her daughter Marie Antoinette. Advancing in age, she desired peace and stability for her dynasty in Europe.

But the mediation offer was also a calculated ploy. Maria Theresa still feared the influence of Prussia’s Frederick II, especially as she believed he manoeuvred to dislodge her strained, but still necessary, alliance with France. A mediator role between the Atlantic powers had a lot to offer her. In this role, the Habsburgs would be able to raise themselves above Prussia after such a calamitous war. Whether or not the Americans would gain independence, being the arbitrator would put the Habsburgs in a position of strength among the European powers at a time when alliances and rivalries seemed to be shifting. The war against Prussia may have ended in Teschen, but the struggle resumed in the diplomatic realm. Maria Theresa accordingly set about convincing the French of her honest intentions through indirect means. She urged her ambassador to portray it as a “courtly compliment” from one monarch to another. She was, as usual, blunter in discussing the matter with Marie Antoinette. She declared how her interests were the same as those of the French crown and pressed the young queen to ensure the king would accept only her offer. Maria Theresa’s efforts were utterly in vain, however. On May 27, 1779, King Louis graciously declined the invitation citing the prior refusal of Britain to accede to a similar Spanish-led mediation. In reality, rejection stemmed from the French foreign minister Vergennes’s distrust of his Habsburg allies since he sensed the upset in Vienna caused by the Peace of Teschen.

Joseph II’s posturing did not help his mother’s efforts any either. The emperor had disliked Breteuil’s obstinate attitude over Bavaria from the beginning. His regard for the French ambassador had declined following the impertinence of the Lee affair, and his barely dry signature on the humiliating treaty at Teschen was the final straw. Joseph disparaged Breteuil whenever he could and mentioned as much in his letters to Marie Antoinette so courtiers in Versailles would know too. Rumours swirled whether Breteuil would quit his post but he endured the abuse for several years more—the unfortunate man went on to become the French monarchy’s last prime minister on the eve of the French Revolution. In 1783, Joseph aired his grievances about France in a striking letter to his sister. He believed France had always undermined Habsburg interests within and outside the Holy Roman Empire. Joseph had not done the same to them. He had not complained even when French enlargements were harmful
to Habsburg interests such as the acquisition of Corsica “which had been very prejudicial to the interests of the House of Austria and its branches in Italy.”

Joseph’s frustration with French actions had smouldered before 1779 and then severely impaired the French willingness to hand him or his mother primacy in potential peace negotiations over America. Joseph’s actions, furthermore, gave the French little confidence in a fair mediation. During a lengthy conference with the Dutch ambassador, for example, Joseph argued for them to abandon their anti-British approach, warning of the dangers if the French and Spanish were to unseat the British in the Atlantic. Making matters worse, Joseph also planned a visit to England, which never materialised and perhaps had no other reason than to antagonise the French further.

Whereas Habsburg overtures had fallen on deaf French ears, the situation in Vienna gave some encouragement that the British would take up the offer. In May 1779, Maria Theresa—acting through Kaunitz—ventured the same proposition to the British ambassador Sir Robert Murray Keith, who reported back to London that the offer was cordial and open, meaning if they were to decline, it would do no harm. Months went by before Keith received further instruction. The British ministers were willing to accept the invitation but stipulated in mid-July that foreign support of the colonies must be dropped before negotiation could begin; a demand designed to preclude any chance of negotiating their independence. Conditional acceptance reflected British good faith in the Habsburgs, who, they thought, were more pro-British than anything else. But this did not mean complete trust was forthcoming. Keith’s first objective was apprehending the origin of the offer. Had Maria Theresa thought of it herself or had the French some part in it? The answer was paramount as the British suspected France would not (or could not) betray American independence, and so any intermediary power agreed by them might have accepted this premise already.

Keith acted quickly. He rushed to the countryside palace at Laxenburg where Kaunitz was staying to make his enquiry and signal the conditional acceptance. His secretary accompanied him so that he could produce a verbatim report of what happened next. Kaunitz confirmed the independent origin of the offer. France had no part in it. Instead, the Habsburgs were animated by the desire to tend to the “increasing flame,” as Kaunitz characterised the American Revolution. His next words were music to British ears. Kaunitz offered to work in total “candour and openness” with Keith for a mediation under Habsburg supervision. His plan involved renewing the overtures to France and Spain without informing the courts of the British tacit acceptance. Instead, Kaunitz would instruct his ambassadors to merely insinuate that the British were willing to
accept and that terms of peace must be put forward by all parties. Kaunitz’s plan met British expectations since he spoke plainly of the “three courts” (Britain, France, and Spain) as the intended participants, ignoring the Americans. Kaunitz then moved on to matters more delicate for the Habsburgs: would there be a co-mediator and where would such a negotiation be held? Kaunitz made clear that the Prussians could not be contemplated, but some other state might join if so wished. The venue would be Vienna, pending confirmation. The final obstacle was Breteuil, whose spies, Kaunitz knew, had followed Keith and who would raise suspicions about their extraordinary meeting in the countryside. Together they concocted a plausible explanation about Keith handing over papers of ill-consequence from his latest despatch. Plans concluded, Keith took his leave. And so in the idyllic settings of Palace Laxenburg just outside Vienna, the first real hopes had been kindled for an end to the War of American Independence.

Meanwhile, Maria Theresa had lost all hope for the mediation. Winning over one side was not enough. She felt British interests were too strong in Vienna and knew the French would not trust Joseph over the fate of North America. “The predilection here for England is always manifesting itself more and more,” she lamented to her ambassador in Paris. In the intervening months, both Maria Theresa and Joseph sounded out the opinion of Marie Antoinette concerning the French position. Only a handful of the letters between her and Joseph survived the destruction of another revolution, so we are left to wonder what they might have discussed during this period. Maria Theresa’s enquiries, however, did survive. Their letters reveal a mother and daughter of the same mind on the importance of peace for Europe. “My heart desires it more than anything else in the world,” Marie Antoinette wrote. She did not expect peace any time soon, however. In 1779, France had just secured Spanish entry into the war, pitting Britain against two continental enemies with a superior combined force at sea. From the French perspective, it was time to strike whilst the iron was hot rather than time to strike a deal.

Kaunitz pondered the impasse with his subordinates in Paris and Madrid. News from the latter was promising. Despite initial rejection, the Habsburg ambassador in Madrid, his son Count Dominik Andreas von Kaunitz-Questenberg, was optimistic in September 1779. He had immediately gone to Spain’s chief minister José Moñino y Redondo, conde de Floridablanca, who responded well to the idea. Floridablanca tentatively accepted the invitation but would only confirm Spain’s participation after consultation with France. Kaunitz-Questenberg prodded for an answer two months later but without much luck. In an empty memorandum, Floridablanca confirmed general desires for peace and insisted
on a congress but revealed precious little in terms of Spain’s demands or thinking about how such a meeting could be achieved. It had become clear that the Spanish would not act alone and would only follow France’s lead, which would then entail American participation and in turn scupper any British involvement.

The question became, therefore, how likely was American independence and could the British withstand the revolutionaries’ demands for their separation? More exposed to the pro-American euphoria around Franklin at the French court, Count Florimond Mercy-d’Argenteau believed that the American side held the upper hand. At best, their position afforded them “absolute independence” and at worst, a modified existence within the British empire. The recent troubles in Ireland over the anti-papist acts passed by the British Parliament strengthened his opinion. Kaunitz thought otherwise. He was more susceptible to Keith’s opinions on the matter. From Kaunitz’s perspective, American independence was not at all assured. The British could withstand the financial stresses of the war better than the other belligerents. Prolonged conflict would lead the powers involved to peace eventually, but he supposed Britain’s situation would improve before then. As 1779 drew to a close, Kaunitz resolved to await any changes in the fortunes of the belligerents, which would then bring about the prospects of peace.

Events in 1780 exacerbated Maria Theresa’s failure to secure a Habsburg mediation. The Habsburgs had been one of the first to issue such a proposition
among the European powers, but they were no longer alone. In December 1779, the Russian Empress Catherine II sought to build upon her prestige at Teschen by instructing her foreign minister Count Nikita Ivanovich Panin to pursue a Russian-mediated peace. In March 1780, King Ferdinand IV of Naples-Sicily made similar overtures through his representative in London. Indeed, by then some peace talks had begun. The Spanish had entered the war with limited objectives—primarily the conquest of Gibraltar and Minorca—and were willing to concede their participation as leverage towards these aims in secret negotiations started with an informal British delegation. Habsburg officials tracked the course of these meetings intently but sensed nothing would come of them. New military developments in North America further frustrated the prospects of peace. When the Siege of Charleston ended with the British occupation of the city, both Maria Theresa and Marie Antoinette despaired. They were not distraught for the American loss—the “miserable defence” of the Americans was to be expected from “such bad troops” in Marie Antoinette’s opinion—instead, they feared the British victory would protract the war further and diminish the chances of Maria Theresa’s “long-hoped for” peace.

Despite renewed pessimism, obstacles, and competition, Kaunitz pursued a solo Habsburg mediation throughout 1780. He sought in vain to appease all sides by tempting each of them to the table with incompatible or incredible offers. In Paris, Mercy-d’Argenteau reportedly proposed an immediate armistice to last nine years upon the current status quo. In Vienna, Breteuil faced audience after audience with the monarchs on the issue. He conceded nothing and was repulsed by the good-cop, bad-cop tactics of Maria Theresa and Joseph, where the former pleaded for peace on behalf of Europe’s salvation and the latter threatened Breteuil—over the course of a three-hour interview—with tales of how the British would never accept a sovereign United States and the Spanish would never allow such an example in the Americas. At home and abroad, the indefatigable efforts to secure a sole mediation under the Habsburgs failed time and again.

Events soon took away the initiative from Kaunitz. In January 1780, Admiral Rodney relieved the Gibraltar garrison following defeat of the Spanish fleet. In March, Catherine II founded the League of Armed Neutrality as an open international system for neutrals to fend off harassment of their mercantile fleets by belligerents. The League was detrimental to the British capacity to wage war. It marked a stunning failure for the British aim to secure an alliance with Russia, while it brought France’s Vergennes further pleasure to see Russia not only maintain neutrality but to defend it. The League’s creation prompted neutral powers to join in order to protect their commerce and profits from carrying war
supplies to the belligerents. In quick succession, the northern neutrals entered the system.\textsuperscript{79} In November, the Dutch Republic seemed poised to join, but the British could not allow one of the largest foreign carrying fleets to supply their enemies, and so a confiscated plan for American aid from a few Dutch financiers was trumpeted as a breach of their neutrality and the British declared war before the authorised Dutch delegation to St. Petersburg could subscribe to the League.\textsuperscript{80} The beginning of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war, alongside the War of American Independence, marked the lowest point in Britain’s estrangement from the European powers.\textsuperscript{81} The Dutch conflagration came at an inopportune time for the French. Exhausted by the costs of the war and fearful that Spain would abandon the fight given the failure to take Gibraltar, the French council decided in December 1780 that the need for peace had arrived.\textsuperscript{82} Peace, at last, seemed assured.

Although the belligerents in the war had arrived at the point which Kaunitz had long awaited, a sole Habsburg mediation was not guaranteed. In fact, it now seemed more unlikely. For one, the belligerent powers had all viewed the proposal as Maria Theresa’s invention. Her death on November 29, 1780, weakened the credible impartiality of her son and increased French distrust towards his intentions. In his private correspondence, Keith wrote candidly about the positive change in British fortunes after Maria Theresa’s death. “Our Emperor has behaved like an angel ever since his accession,” he exclaimed as he boasted of his “friendly disposition to this country, which at this hour is in a state it never found itself before.”\textsuperscript{83} French ministers sought out an effective counterweight. The earlier Russian offer (from December 1779) appeared to solve both problems; France could sue for peace under a more favourable power, and it would aid their standing with Catherine II.\textsuperscript{84} The Franco-Russian plan was no secret among Europe’s courts before the offer had been accepted and widened to Britain and Spain. Both Kaunitz in Vienna and British ministers in London had heard the rumours from multiple sources and both sides hoped for a compromise.\textsuperscript{85}

Meanwhile, Keith’s new superior in London, David Murray, Viscount Stormont was an Austrophile. Throughout the summer of 1780, Stormont tried to curry favour with the Habsburgs in the hopes of an alliance.\textsuperscript{86} In September, Keith offered Kaunitz British support for the reopening of the River Scheldt, a vital economic waterway in the Austrian Netherlands which had been shut off to maritime commerce by Dutch forts since the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{87} In return, Keith demanded Habsburg co-mediation if the Franco-Russian initiative became real.\textsuperscript{88} Keith’s overtures chimed perfectly with the Habsburg position. Joseph and Kaunitz viewed co-mediation as a success. Not only would it honour the wish of Joseph’s late mother, but it would allow a recovery of their prestige
after Teschen and included the possibility to make the French wince as terms were deliberated. Moreover, a co-mediation with Russia furthered the diplomatic pivot pursued by Joseph who favoured warmer relations with Russia, working toward an alliance, even, which would enable them to focus on joint expansion against the Ottomans. Positive reception in Vienna allowed Stormont to demand co-mediation when the Russian offer arrived in London, which the Russians readily accepted. The Congress of Vienna seemed, at last, to be confirmed. Kaunitz rejoiced at the news, reportedly declaring, “Lord Stormont has baptised the baby!”

Kaunitz worked tirelessly to ensure the Congress of Vienna would be held in the summer of 1781. He insisted on all parties putting forward terms for a mediation. In a memorandum issued to all courts involved, he tasked them with devising terms which they would only accept if they were in the opposing position. The British were pleased by the call. Stormont endeavoured to influence the co-mediators further towards his cause by offering the Russians the island of Minorca and the reopening of the River Scheldt for the Habsburgs. A plan to award the Habsburgs the island of Tobago was also mooted at one point but nothing came of it. Kaunitz rebuffed Keith for such obvious bribes.

For their part, the French were dismayed by the suggestions emanating from Vienna. In mid-February 1781, Breteuil confronted Kaunitz about the trickiest question of all: what was to be the fate of the Americans? Kaunitz understood that the French position demanded their independence but he also realised this was incompatible with British aims. The middle ground, the two men realised, might be partition. If some colonies were to become independent and others returned to the British, then perhaps both sides could be appeased. Kaunitz forwarded the plan to Mercy-d’Argenteau wherein Canada would be returned to the French, Britain would retain the Carolinas and Georgia, and the rest would form a sovereign American republic. It is notable that Kaunitz was indifferent to American independence. From his perspective, it was merely a hurdle to surpass in the negations; if a diminished American state were the result, then it would be up to the Americans to survive. Vergennes agreed with the idea but felt that it could not originate from the French as it would be too painful to the Americans, it would have to come from the mediators instead.

In March, Joseph met with Breteuil to thrash out the problem of American attendance at the Congress of Vienna. Joseph could not reconcile admission of the Americans with British opposition. If any congress were to be successful, then it had to be restricted to the three powers plus the two mediating courts. Joseph mused through possible solutions with Breteuil. What if a separate peace
could be arranged? What if the British regained America in exchange for Gibraltar? Such thoughts were infeasible but demonstrated Joseph’s different thinking. Whereas Kaunitz perceived that the Americans had a plausible chance as a reduced state, Joseph saw their independence as a bargaining chip. Years before he would wage a short war against the Dutch over the issue of the River Scheldt, Joseph seemed tempted by the bait laid out by the British.99 John Adams thought as much from rumors he heard in Amsterdam. In June 1781, he shrewdly called out Joseph’s position. “The Emperor,” he declared, “appears to be more intent at present upon taking a fair Advantage of the present Circumstances, to introduce a flourishing Commerce into the Austrian Flanders, than upon making Treaties with England or waging War in its favour.”100 Meanwhile, Kaunitz continued to work on the American conundrum. In a conversation with Breteuil, he hit upon the idea of each state sending its own representative rather than a single American representative.101 The idea was shrewd. The Americans would be present, perhaps even as plenipotentiaries rather than actual delegates, but they would be so divided among themselves that the British could have their separate peace, picking off the Carolinas and Georgia following the preferred plan of partition. John Adams described this idea decades later as “the most insidious and dangerous Plott that was ever laid to insnare Us and deprive Us of our Independence”; but for the time being, he had no idea of what Kaunitz planned nor how he close he came to seeing it become reality.102

On May 21, 1781, after many months of diplomatic wrangling, Kaunitz and the Russian representative in Vienna, Prince Dmitry Mikhailovich Golitsyn, sent off the preliminary terms for peace at Vienna. The Americans were to be invited and a separate peace worked out exclusively between them and Britain unless either side requested mediation. In trying to please everyone, however, Kaunitz pleased none. The call for a one-year armistice upset the French who feared the British would consolidate their position, while the absence of anything about Gibraltar alienated the Spanish.103 The British raged at the American invitations. Count Belgiojoso, the Habsburg envoy in London, received a thorough dressing down for the impertinent terms.104

This harsh awakening meant that the British outright refused any participation on these terms and placed their hopes instead on the summer campaigns of 1781. The result was disastrous for them as much as it was for concluding peace in Vienna. On October 18, 1781, General Charles Cornwallis surrendered after a lengthy siege at Yorktown. The decisive blow collapsed British hopes for subjugating America and preventing independence. The defeat also signalled a death knell for the Congress of Vienna. The British had lost the ability to hold
out and so peace, it seemed obvious, would take place under American, French, and Spanish terms. Upon hearing the news, the Spanish special envoy sent to Vienna as the provisional representative packed up his bags and left. Kaunitz attempted in vain to keep alive the prospects for an international summit in Vienna. The fall of the North ministry in London in March 1782 confirmed the new reality when his successor despatched an envoy to Paris to sue for peace. Kaunitz could do little more than concede the ultimate loss of the Habsburgs’ cherished congress.

Cold-shouldered by the victors, Kaunitz and Joseph resented the new peace plans and abhorred the French disregard for their earnest attempt to secure a universal peace. In 1783, Joseph still spoke bitterly of it. “Could France have achieved the same and come out of the last war with England with such advantages,” he scorned, “if not for the assuredness and security of my involvement.” Stormont had failed to accommodate any meaningful role for his perceived saviour in the new negotiations; the Americans and French refused any mediation outright. Besides, Joseph and Kaunitz wanted nothing to do with the new congress. “I am afraid no real assistance can be expected from the Court of Vienna,” Stormont despaired, “who are wedded to the system they have embraced, and will not suffer themselves to see how much their own interests are concerned in the great contest in which we are engaged.” The great contest over America ended not in Vienna but instead in Paris.

Philadelphia in Europe

Writing from Philadelphia almost twenty-five years after the end of the Revolution, Count Charles-Albert de Moré—a nobleman and former aide-de-camp to Lafayette and Washington—responded with great elation to the news of his older brother’s intention to emigrate from Switzerland. His brother’s choice of destination, the younger Moré commended, “is the most suitable and certain for success,” one where “true pioneers [are] flocking from the most diverse of lands in order to make a new life for themselves.” This attractive place, he continued with praise, “is the port in which castaways find shelter and a new, promising life.” Despite the resemblance, the port Moré spoke so highly of was not his own Philadelphia but instead a place which Moré concluded “is the Philadelphia of Europe”—Trieste. Trieste merited such a comparison; in 1700 it had still been a sleepy trading village nestled along the northernmost end of the Adriatic Sea. By the end of the century, it had transformed into a vibrant cosmopolitan centre of interregional and international commerce. Such transformation came from
the policies of the Habsburgs, who saw the ports of Trieste and Fiume as natural entrepôts for international trade. In 1718, Maria Theresa’s father removed tariffs to make Trieste a free port in emulation of the Spanish trading hubs on the Atlantic coast. In 1775 during one of his visits, Joseph II named Trieste the main port for the hereditary lands and Fiume as the primary outlet for Hungarian goods. In this way, his reforms established a geographically closer trade hub and lowered reliance on the faraway ports on the North Sea. Triestines received even further privileges; a mercantile college and a new stock exchange alongside one of the largest docks along the Adriatic coastline. By the time of the American Revolution, the sleepy harbour had woken up.

The American Revolution excited Triestine merchants for the opportunity to trade directly with North America. Previously, Triestine goods went via the Atlantic ports, especially Cadiz, and American goods arrived via the British Isles and the Austrian Netherlands. An independent United States opened direct trading avenues for Trieste’s merchants for the first time. Habsburg consuls across Europe were assiduous to this fact and urged the Triestine governor to explore this trade. Christian Ludwig Hofer, one such consul in Hamburg, reported sales of Bohemian and Silesian goods from there to America, which, he suggested, could be more cheaply supplied from Trieste. Within twelve months, Hofer sent four more detailed reports including extracts of goods demanded by the president of the Congress. Merchants in Trieste were supremely aware of such possibilities themselves. Months before the adoption of the Declaration of American Independence one informed authorities in Vienna that “the current situation of the English Colonies in America seems to me to merit considerable attention, and more than ever before [...] to have commerce, which has especially made the Dutch and English so rich and respectable.” Such insistence was not a singular occurrence. Ministers received numerous petitions agitating to exploit the revolutionary turmoil. Petitions came from serious members of Habsburg society. During the summer of 1782, amid rumours of a definitive peace, Jean Gabriel, comte de Raineval et de Fauquembergue proposed a Central and North American trading mission to Kaunitz, but received refusal days later. Johann Zollikofer von Sonnenberg, member of a large Swiss mercantile dynasty, proposed several ships for an expedition from Trieste to the United States. Joseph personally scrutinised the proposal but eventually rejected it because of the “extraordinary claims necessary” to fund the operation.

Domestic petitioners for new transatlantic trade were not alone. Petitions for direct trade between Trieste and the United States reached all sides. In November 1779, a local captain introduced the Governor of Trieste Karl von Zinzendorf
to Dr. George Logan, a Pennsylvanian medical graduate of the University of Edinburgh who toured Europe after his studies. Zinzendorf surmised Logan was an unofficial “agent of Congress” who “without an audience in Vienna […] now comes here to inquire if trade relations between this port and the United States might be born after the peace.” In January 1782, Franklin noted an extraordinary meeting in his diary. Willem Bolts, the architect of Habsburg trade with the Far East, came to propose how a circumnavigational route might take goods from Trieste to China and from there to the United States and back to Trieste. Franklin entertained “much Discourse” about the idea and gave Bolts “Hopes of it upon a Peace,” but nothing more. At the same time, François Emmanuel Joseph Baraux, an Antwerp merchant who had relocated to Trieste, wrote to John Adams on behalf of the Imperial Privileged Trading Company in Trieste. He requested “an extensive list of the best Merchants in the different towns of America” so his company could “get into a reciprocal, advantageous connection.” In his reply, Adams noted how after peace “there will probably be a considerable Trade between the several Ports of the United States of America and Trieste, through which place I fancy several American Productions will find their Way into the Interior of the Austrian Dominions.” In both encounters, Adams and Franklin expressed their belief that commerce with Trieste could only establish itself once a general peace had been concluded.

Triestine merchants were rather more impatient, however. Ignaz Verpoorten, another merchant who had swapped Antwerp for the Adriatic, became the first pioneer. As director of the Trieste and Fiume Sugar Company since 1776, Verpoorten had an obvious interest in American markets, but his position also afforded him important contact within the local and Viennese administrations. Through these channels, he urged for peace in the Americas and support for a trading mission to the United States. He met with Zinzendorf to discuss the expedition in January 1782. In order to realise this scheme, Verpoorten had to obtain a patent for the ship’s use of the imperial ensign, granted only by the Aulic Chamber (Hofkammer) in agreement with the vessel owners, the captain, and local officials—in this case Zinzendorf and the head of the municipal stock exchange. Verpoorten applied for the imperial patent for his ship l’Americano, which the authorities approved on May 31, 1782, long after his intended departure. The Americano set sail for the northern Caribbean and Carolinas a few weeks later with a crew of twenty and 286 tonnes of goods. The Americano became the first ship to sail directly between Trieste and the New World. The cargo featured textiles, metalwares, glass, and wines for export and imported sugar, rum, and indigo from the Caribbean and Carolinas. It was a risky but
profitable venture. Verpoorten established a new company to solidify his gains. The *Verpoortische Assecuranz und Handlungs-Compagnie* received its imperial grant on June 21, 1782, and became the first American-Triestine company as a result. The company’s charter reflected the seriousness of the ambition to trade with the United States. An endowment of four million florins, imperial protections, and tax exemption on domestic goods set to last for twenty years ensured considerable interest in the new firm. News of its announcement made front-page headlines in the *Wienerisches Diarium* and featured in mercantile journals in Hamburg and Weimar. In early November 1782, Verpoorten sent two further ships from Trieste to North America.

Verpoorten was the first merchant to trade directly between Trieste and North America, but only just. In 1781 three additional applications arrived at the Aulic Chamber but they had faltered for one reason or another. In March, the Serbian-Greek merchant Jovo Kurtović had applied for his ship *La Città di Vienna* (or *La Bella Vienna*) but fell foul to scrutiny. Safeguarding neutrality, Aulic Chamber officials prevented merchants from trading military contraband without official sanctions. The respected merchant Count Johann Berchtold de Proli, who was part of a famous mercantile dynasty in the Austrian Netherlands, scuppered Kurtović’s application with a disapproving report raising concerns over contraband. Proli’s damaging report was likely a dubious manoeuvre since he had intervened—this time favourably—in another proposal by Johann Jakob Kick, the imperial consul in Marseilles and a close associate of the Proli family. Kick’s plan intended for the *Comte de Cobenzl* to sail from Trieste to Africa and onwards to North America. Yet there was a hitch with the captain and main financiers of the expedition who were not natural-born imperial subjects. Strict maritime laws prohibited foreign-born subjects from enjoying imperial protections—in Verpoorten’s *l’Americano* mission, six merchants signed an affidavit to confirm the Italian captain owed his allegiance to the emperor. Proli’s interjection argued that Kick and other financiers were imperial subjects and constituted a majority of the interested parties, and, therefore, the mission should go ahead. But officials remained unconvinced. Kick received an outright refusal in mid-August.

A week after Kick’s application failed, Zinzendorf met with the director of the Imperial Privileged Trading Company in Trieste, Johann Heinrich Frohn, who, together with Baraux and Proli, proposed another American scheme. The new plan involved *La Città di Trieste*—perhaps the hastily renamed *La Città di Vienna*—under a Milanese captain and backed by prominent Triestine and Hungarian nobles such as Count Samuel Gyulay von Maronsnémeth.
Recommendation by Zinzendorf preceded official approval in Vienna but despite success with the court bureaucracy, no further records exist of their mission to America. By 1783, the Aulic Chamber had received four proposals for direct trade between Trieste and America, two of which gained approval.

Direct trade with North America arose out of its perceived profitability, but how valuable was this new trade? Statistical tables showing Trieste’s imports and exports are patchy throughout the eighteenth century, but thankfully a statistical table compiled in 1783 upon the arrival of a new governor shines light on the initial year of Triestine-American commerce. Administrators already recognised the economic contributions of North America by listing it under a separate heading, *l’Amérique Septentrionale*, which they further subdivided into the “Antilles” or “America Septentrionale.” The table also allows for precise valuation as it shows the amount and value of each product. In 1783, forty-nine products featured under the “America Septentrionale” heading, ranging from ironware to gypsum, and from quicksilver to luxury woods. Textiles formed the largest export group (thirty-two percent of American exports) with a value of 30,400fl. Textiles combined with glassware (fourteen percent) and agricultural equipment (seven percent) comprised the majority of exported goods to the United States. It is likely that this table reflects Verpoorten’s voyages to North America in 1782 since he carried a large amount of agricultural and metalwares for a Boston firm.

Table 1 below reveals Verpoorten’s strategy of carrying diverse goods to America, as forty-six other products constituted the remaining fifty percent of export value. On a national scale, this trade already represented the size of a large-scale firm. The firm *Artaria & Co.*, for example, was the first major music publishing house in the Vienna. In 1787, the company’s stock value totalled 74,373fl and made the owner Domenico Artaria one of “the richest merchants in Vienna.” The twofold larger income from the United States made Verpoorten and other merchants in Trieste comparatively richer and underlines the reasons behind the popularity and excitement over his new American trading company.

Triestine merchants sourced a mix of domestic and foreign products to export to the United States. Administrators distinguished goods between “*prodotti della Germania*” and “*commercio di Economia*” to delineate products imported from abroad (commercio) and those sourced from markets within the Holy Roman Empire (Germania). Domestic products featured textiles from Bohemia and metalwares from Carinthia and Styria whilst foreign products included *dolci* (currants, raisins, sultanas) and *legno bosso* or *legno scodano* (boxwood and unseasoned wood). Wood products originated from around the Adriatic region whilst
currants came from the Eastern Mediterranean. Merchants sourced these goods to export almost exclusively to American markets. Table 2 below highlights goods for which at least one-fifth of the total import into Trieste was then reshipped to the United States. These products were predominantly industrial or luxury goods.

The commercial importance of the United States is underscored when compared with other international destinations. In 1783, the value of exports to the United States amounted to 96,177 florins or less than one percent of total export value. This sum might not appear very high, but it is substantial, especially for a nascent trading route. Among Triestine export destinations that year, the United States ranked twelfth out of twenty total countries. Triestine merchants exported more commercial value to the United States than Holland, the West Indies, Malta, England, Flanders, Sicily, the Barbary States, or the Republic of Ragusa. The Habsburg Monarchy had begun trading ventures to India and China in 1775. No separate values were given for either India or China but the combined value of exports to these two markets in 1783 was only 26,161 florins higher than those to the United States. In other words, within the first year of direct American trade, Triestine merchants obtained seventy-eight percent of the value of the expeditions to India and China. It was a testament to the profitability and desirability of the new transatlantic route within the Habsburg ambition to trade globally.

### Table 1. Highest Valued Exports to the United States from Trieste, 1783

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Name (Orig.)</th>
<th>Product Name (Eng.)</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Exports to US</th>
<th>Value (fl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telerie Diversi di Germania</td>
<td>German Linens</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>30,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vetri e Cristalli</td>
<td>Glass and Crystals</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferramenta Lavorata</td>
<td>Agricultural Tools</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rame</td>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanerie</td>
<td>Wools</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setarie</td>
<td>Millet</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordami</td>
<td>Rigging/Cording</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acciaro</td>
<td>Steel</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uvapassa</td>
<td>Raisins</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solf</td>
<td>Sulphur</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2,118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FHKA, NHK, Kommerz Litorale Akten, Generalia, K. 850 (1780-1785), fols. 1003-1020.
Trieste remained a predominantly Mediterranean port, however. The vast majority of export value lay in the Italian regions around Venice, Ferrara, Lombardy and the Papal States. No more than five percent of total export value flowed beyond the Mediterranean. These destinations included India, China, the United States, the West Indies, England, the Dutch Republic, the Austrian Netherlands, Hamburg, and the United States. When compared to these other extra-Mediterranean destinations, however, the importance of the United States market becomes clearer; the United States ranked first in value. It cannot be doubted that for such initial commercial connection, the United States quickly outperformed other trade routes which had been established for far longer. This rapid rise validates the interest of Triestine merchants to capitalise on new transatlantic commerce and to gain profits from the newly independent United States of America.

### Conclusion

The later years of the American Revolution provided two ports of the Habsburg Monarchy with unparalleled economic opportunities. Neutrality had been a difficult position to maintain in the early stages of the war, but as new belligerents entered the war, neutrality became an increasingly beneficial stance. New direct trading routes, either through novel mercantile initiatives in Trieste or the influx of masked shipping via Ostend, allowed Habsburg merchants the unique chance to profit from the chaos of revolution. Access to Atlantic markets opened

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Name (Original)</th>
<th>Product Name (English)</th>
<th>Percentage of Product’s Total Original Import to Trieste</th>
<th>Value (fl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Spongie</em></td>
<td>Sponges</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Solfò</em></td>
<td>Sulphur</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>2,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Verderame</em></td>
<td>Copper sulphate</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cordami</em></td>
<td>Rigging/Cording</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>2,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Galla</em></td>
<td>Gall</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>1,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vino ordinario</em></td>
<td>Ordinary Wines</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Capari [Capperi]</em></td>
<td>Capers</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** FHKA, NHK, Kommerz Litorale Akten, Generalia, K. 850 (1780-1785), fols. 1003-1020.
opportunities for Habsburg merchandise. The desire to maintain these new avenues of trade fuelled debates among Habsburg ministers on the best methods to secure it for the long term. The first ideas of official relations between the Habsburg Monarchy and the United States were born out of these debates which rested upon the establishment of diplomatic ties through treaties of commerce and consular representation.

Yet the impatience to recognise the United States did not outweigh the consideration for international conventions. If peace remained elusive, so did any prospect of Habsburg interaction with an independent United States. The same elusive peace evaded the best efforts of the Habsburg rulers themselves along with Prince Kaunitz who ardently sought to utilise the international desire for peace to their benefit. The failed hopes for a Congress of Vienna in 1782 represented the end to a serious initiative on behalf of the Habsburgs to end the War of American Independence under their mediation in Vienna. The rationale for doing so included little consideration for American independence and was more concerned with appeasing the belligerents into entering peace talks which remained the primary aim of Kaunitz’s efforts. He failed in this process and in doing so, ensured the Peace of Vienna became the Peace of Paris as we remember it today.