Spanish imperialism in the Philippines was part of the global economic development in the 15th century in Europe when both Spain and Portugal rivaled each other in their search for the spice islands in the east. The Spanish Crown had to discover a westward route to the west because the Portuguese already controlled the eastern route (via Cape of Good Hope, Africa) leading to the Molucas Islands. Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines was administered by Spain thru the Vice Royalty of Mexico. This system of using a government intermediary (Mexico) became an inefficient tool of monitoring the colonial desk in the orient which resulted in so many abuses committed by the colonial administrators especially in the religious sector. The oppressive acts of the Spaniards in the Philippines, one way or another, gave rise to much discontent which manifested itself in many independent resistance movements among the inhabitants in the islands. However, the shift of political atmosphere in Europe from conservative to liberal had some favorable effects in the colony. One consequence of this was the introduction of liberal policies in Manila. Such liberal policies ended up with some Filipinos, particularly men, earning education both in the Philippines and Europe. The educated Filipinos spearheaded the reform movement as well as the subsequent revolution in the Philippines.

The last decade of the 19th century in the Philippines marked the peak of the Philippine nationalist movement that led to the establishment of the Philippine Republic in 1899. However, another global political upheaval happened with the bombing of S.S. Maine in the Havana Harbor in Cuba. This scenario made the U.S. Congress to pass the Teller Amendment declaring the Spanish-American War. It was because of this declaration that the United States Navy went to Hong Kong for the naval offensives to be launched in Manila Bay. The Filipino leaders who were then in Hong Kong were dragged into this global political conflict after they were convinced to join the United States. The Filipinos collaborated in good faith believing that the Americans will fulfill their promise to leave the islands after the Spanish surrender.

Despite the proclamation of Philippine Independence on June 12, 1898, the United States pursued the Spanish surrender until August 13, 1898. This surrender became the basis of the Treaty of Paris in December 1898 disregarding the United States promise to leave the Philippines for good. This double cross by the United States angered the Filipinos. As a result, a war started between the Filipinos and the Americans in February 1899. The so-called Philippine - American war which started on February 4, 1899 lasted up to 1914 and ended the entire resistance from north to south of the islands. The United States government seeing the futility of armed struggle commenced the civil administration in 1901 which became the effective tool in pacifying the Filipinos.