‘The history of the world is but the biography of great men,’ wrote Thomas Carlyle, articulating a view that has since been attacked by successive generations of historians who have instead concentrated on what TS Eliot called the ‘vast impersonal forces’ that affect the story of Mankind. To discover who’s right, we will investigate the roles of twelve great – in the sense of influential, rather than morally admirable – modern European statesmen, looking at the impact on their own countries and on the wider world of the lives and careers of Napoleon Bonaparte, Otto von Bismarck, Lord Salisbury, David Lloyd George, Francisco Franco, Joseph Stalin, Neville Chamberlain, Benito Mussolini, Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, and Margaret Thatcher.