Recent years have witnessed an upsurge in global health emergencies—from SARS to Ebola to Zika, and today the new Covid-19. Each of these occurrences has sparked calls for improved health systems and forecasting performances. Starting from a history of health preparedness from its beginnings in 1950s Cold War civil defense to the early twenty-first century, Andrew Lakoff analyses how international health authorities has carved out a global space for governing potential outbreaks. His researches on alert systems and preparedness devices used by health authorities, government officials, and vaccine manufacturers, will be the starting point to reflect on current responses to the COVID-19 global pandemic.