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First Confirmed AI-Agent Intrusions in Switzerland: Lessons from BACS

What the Disclosure Means for Critical Infrastructure and SMEs

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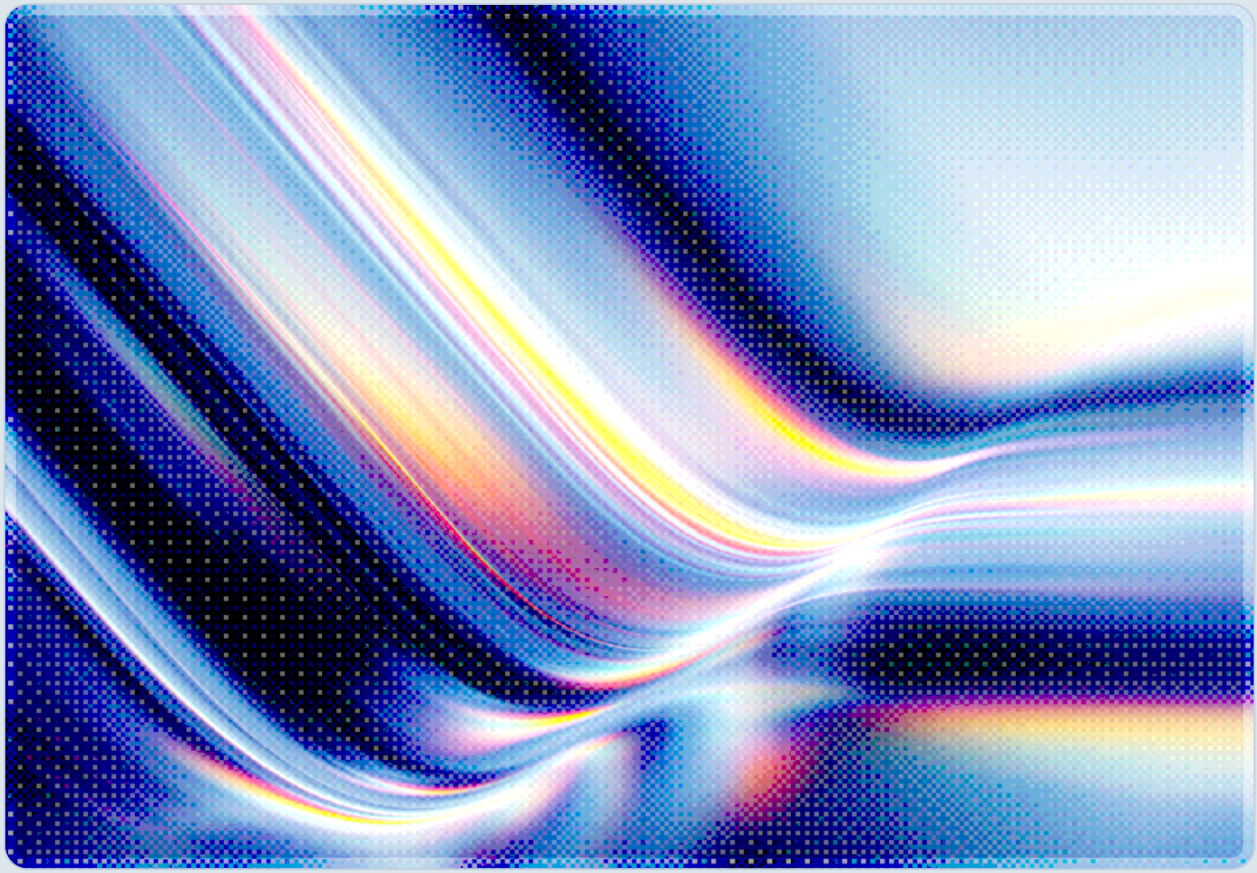
AI-assisted Rapid Research



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Key Takeaways

On 24 November 2026, Switzerland's Federal Office for Cybersecurity (BACS, formerly the National Cyber Security Centre or NCSC, a name still used in some English-language material) announced its first confirmed cyberattacks carried out with AI agents. Organisations and operators of critical infrastructure "across at least two sectors" were affected, and BACS stated that "in all cyberattacks known to the NCSC, the use of AI agents led to the successful compromise of the victim's IT systems" [1]. Two days later, BACS director Florian Schütz told Swiss public broadcaster SRF that there were five confirmed cases, that three targeted critical infrastructure operators, and that systems were compromised in four of the five [2][3]. BACS reported no major outages and has not attributed the attacks or named the victims [2][4].

What gives this disclosure its weight is how ordinary the intrusions were. According to BACS, the agents got in through "standard or easily guessed passwords, as well as known vulnerabilities in software or in systems connected to the internet" [1]. The difference was speed and persistence: the agents needed "only a fraction of the time a human would need" and switched methods when defenders responded [1]. The Swiss cases indicate that hygiene gaps organisations have long treated as manageable backlog items can now be found and exploited at machine speed.

Several conclusions follow for security leaders. Patch expectations have tightened sharply: BACS now recommends installing critical updates on internet-facing systems "no later than 24 hours after release" [1], far shorter than the monthly cycles many organisations still run. The tooling is also spreading, with BACS reporting that the number of internet-accessible offensive AI agents, naming ARTEX and CyberStrikeAI, "has almost doubled since October 2026" [1]. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are highly exposed and likely under-counted. SME victims were among the confirmed cases and reported voluntarily, and an independent expert warned that tens of thousands of Swiss SMEs cannot raise their security level on their own [2].

Finally, the Swiss disclosure fits a broader pattern of official warnings. Italy's ACN, the US FBI, and Swiss authorities each warned about agentic offensive frameworks within an 11-day span [1][5][6], although no authority has linked the campaigns. Taken together, these disclosures suggest that agentic offensive tooling has moved from research demonstrations into operational use against ordinary organisations, and that defenders should plan accordingly.

Background

The Disclosure Timeline

The Swiss disclosure came in two stages. On 24 November 2026, BACS published the notice "Cyberattacks involving AI agents: First confirmed cases in Switzerland," saying it had received its first reports of such attacks "in recent days" and calling them "a shift in the cyber threat landscape" [1]. Speaking to *Le Temps*, as reported by watson with Keystone-SDA material, BACS described the cases as a *Wendepunkt*, or turning point [4]. The notice did not give a case count. It did say that BACS was sharing technical detection indicators with critical infrastructure operators.

The figures came on 26 November, when Schütz appeared on SRF's morning programme *HeuteMorgen*. He said, "We currently have five confirmed cases of attacks with AI agents," and SRF reported that systems were successfully breached in four of the five [2]. Reuters gave the same figures, quoting a BACS statement that "in four of the five cases, the attacks were successful and systems were compromised," and reported that SRF named electricity, water, and telecommunications as the affected critical infrastructure sectors [3]. SRF's own report, however, lists these sectors as examples of critical infrastructure, and BACS has said only that at least two sectors were affected [1][2]. Schütz declined to name the victims, saying that "those affected have the right to communicate themselves" [2].

Published reports do not agree on how many attacks succeeded, and readers should be aware of the discrepancy. Watson, drawing on Keystone-SDA, reported that two of the three critical infrastructure attacks succeeded [4]. SRF and Reuters report four successes out of five [2][3]. BACS's original notice said all attacks known at the time had succeeded [1]. One reading that reconciles these accounts is that both SME attacks and two of the three critical infrastructure attacks succeeded, and that a fifth, unsuccessful case was confirmed after 24 November. No official source has stated this breakdown, so it should be treated as an inference.

Agentic Offensive Frameworks

BACS attributes the attacks to "so-called 'Agentic Offensive Frameworks'". It defines these as AI agents that "independently search for vulnerabilities, select suitable attack tools, evaluate the results, and plan and execute the next steps" [1]. The agency also notes that the same tools are used legitimately for penetration testing. That dual-use quality matters, because it means attackers need neither model training nor bespoke malware development to use them. Several of the named frameworks are distributed as open-source software that connects to commercial or open-weight language models [5][6].

The notice names ARTEX and CyberStrikeAI as examples of frameworks whose internet-accessible instances have grown, but it does not say these tools were used in the five Swiss cases. Swiss authorities have not confirmed which tool or which threat actor was involved [1][4]. The broader picture comes from the FBI, which, according to BleepingComputer's reporting, issued a FLASH alert on 13 November 2026 warning that threat actors had weaponised ARTEX against financial, government, technology, defence, and healthcare organisations [6]. As reported by BleepingComputer, the advisory describes ARTEX as a multi-agent platform that drives external large language models and states that some intrusions reached privileged access in under three hours [6].

On 23 November 2026, the day before the Swiss notice, Italy's national cybersecurity agency (ACN) published a bulletin rated "critical" through CSIRT Italia. It described "mass compromise campaigns conducted by autonomous agents orchestrated through artificial intelligence" and named ARTEX, CyberStrikeAI, DeepSeek Harness (Red Team mode), and PentAGI [5]. The ACN bulletin gives more technical detail than BACS's notice. It describes a coordinator agent directing specialised agents for reconnaissance, vulnerability discovery, exploitation, and persistence, with the agents prioritising known vulnerabilities and unauthenticated interfaces before tunnelling into internal networks [5]. Because the Swiss and Italian disclosures arrived within a day of each other and name overlapping frameworks, Swiss defenders may reasonably treat the Italian bulletin as a useful technical companion. That is a judgement, though, not an established link between the campaigns.

The Swiss Reporting Context

The disclosure also reflects Switzerland's reporting regime. Since 1 April 2025 [8], Swiss critical infrastructure operators have been legally required to report cyberattacks to BACS within 24 hours of discovery, with a fuller report due within 14 days [7]. SMEs outside the critical infrastructure designation have no such obligation. SRF specifically noted that the SME victims reported voluntarily [2]. This asymmetry suggests the five confirmed cases are a floor, not a census. Critical infrastructure incidents are likely to be counted, while SME compromises surface only when victims choose to report them.

Security Analysis

Old Weaknesses, New Tempo

The main lesson from the Swiss cases is that AI agents did not need new techniques. BACS identified weak or default credentials and known, unpatched vulnerabilities as the entry points [1]. Schütz put it plainly: "If there is no vulnerability, an AI agent cannot penetrate a system either" [2]. This is reassuring in one sense,

because the defensive controls are well understood. It is concerning in another, because it suggests that many organisations have accepted risk on the assumption that attackers lacked the time to find every exposed weakness.

Agentic frameworks remove that assumption. A human operator works through targets one after another, tires, and gives up when progress stalls. An agent, as BACS describes it, can "react flexibly to defence mechanisms by switching to other known attack methods," which gives defenders "significantly less time to detect an attack and respond" [1]. Raphael Reischuk, co-founder of Switzerland's National Test Institute for Cybersecurity, told SRF that agents are more persistent than humans and can run many attacks in parallel, and that "the AI simply looks for where software is still running, where the vulnerability has not been fixed" [2]. The combined effect is that the attacker's cost of searching for weaknesses across a whole national internet footprint falls sharply, while the defender's cost of closing those weaknesses stays the same.

The table below compares commonly assumed baselines behind vulnerability management with the conditions the BACS, ACN, and FBI disclosures describe. The baselines in the middle column are illustrative generalisations rather than measured values; the right-hand column is sourced row by row.

Dimension	Traditional Assumption	Conditions Under Agentic Attack
Time from patch release to exploitation	Days to weeks; monthly patch cycles tolerated	BACS advises patching within 24 hours [1]; ACN says monthly cycles are no longer adequate [5]
Attacker attention	Limited; opportunistic targets often skipped	Parallel, persistent scanning of many targets at once [2]
Response to defences	Attacker pauses or abandons	Agent switches to alternative known methods [1]
Skill required	Experienced operator	Natural-language direction of open-source frameworks [5]
Time to privileged access	Days	Under three hours in some ARTEX cases, per the FBI advisory as reported [6]
Lateral spread	Manual, staged	Rapid propagation from first foothold to wider infrastructure [5]

Critical Infrastructure Implications

Reuters reported that the targeted operators included electricity, water, and telecommunications providers [3], although SRF's original report lists these as examples of critical infrastructure and BACS has said only that at least two sectors were affected [1][2]. The targeting of critical infrastructure operators matters even though no major outages occurred. Public reporting does not say whether the compromised systems were IT systems, operational technology, or both. BACS's notice refers to the victims' "IT systems" [1]. In many utilities, though, internet-facing IT assets such as VPN gateways, webmail, and remote-access portals sit only a few network hops from operational environments. An agent designed to tunnel and pivot after initial access, as the ACN bulletin describes [5], raises the risk that a perimeter credential failure turns into an operational technology incident. The absence of outages in these five cases should therefore not be read as evidence that operational systems are out of reach.

Critical infrastructure operators also face a timing problem. The Swiss reporting obligation gives them 24 hours to notify BACS after discovering an attack [7]. If an agent can reach privileged access in hours, much of an intrusion may be over before discovery. Detection capability, rather than reporting procedure, is therefore likely to be the binding constraint. BACS's recommendation to detect "changes in behaviour and data volumes" across identities, applications, workloads, and infrastructure [1] speaks directly to this gap.

The SME Problem

SMEs are arguably the most exposed group in the Swiss disclosure. Many lack dedicated security staff, run internet-facing services set up years ago, and patch on irregular schedules. These are exactly the conditions agentic frameworks exploit. Reischuk said it is "unrealistic" to expect the security level of "tens of thousands of SMEs in Switzerland" to rise through their own efforts, and called on the federal government to consider jointly funded support, comparable to how drinking water and electricity are treated [2]. He also observed that "the problem is not being taken seriously enough by companies" [2].

A 24-hour patch target is ambitious for a well-resourced enterprise. For a small manufacturer or professional services firm with one IT generalist, or an outsourced provider on a monthly contract, it may be unattainable without structural change. This suggests the most effective SME interventions will be architectural rather than procedural. Reducing the number of exposed services, moving remote access behind managed identity-aware gateways, and transferring patch responsibility to providers with contractual response-time obligations all help. SMEs are also frequently suppliers to critical infrastructure operators, so their compromise can provide an indirect route to the higher-value targets BACS is most concerned about. That is an inference from general supply-chain risk patterns, not something BACS reported in these cases.

Detection and Attribution Challenges

The ACN bulletin notes that agentic campaigns are hard to detect because they chain vulnerabilities, misconfigurations, and stolen credentials, sometimes far apart in time, and because some frameworks generate code on the fly to evade endpoint defences [5]. Because these frameworks are dual-use, their traffic can also resemble an authorised penetration test. Organisations that run their own agentic red-team tooling will need clear authorisation records and network-level identification of legitimate testing so that defenders can tell sanctioned activity from hostile activity. BACS has not named the attackers [1], and attribution may become harder in general when many unrelated actors run the same publicly available frameworks against the same exposed attack surface.

Recommendations

Immediate Actions

BACS asked organisations to implement its six measures "without delay" [1], and CSA considers these the appropriate starting point. Organisations should first list every internet-facing system and remove those that do not need to be exposed. Remaining services should be restricted where feasible through geo-blocking or allow lists. Critical updates for internet-facing systems should be applied within 24 hours of release, and systems that cannot be patched on that timeline should be isolated until they can be. All internet-reachable internal resources, including webmail, VPN, and remote-access portals, should require MFA or passkeys "consistently and without exception" [1]. Default and weak credentials should be eliminated across exposed systems as a priority, given that BACS identified them as a primary entry point.

Critical infrastructure operators should confirm they are receiving the detection indicators BACS is sharing, and should check their environments against the 81 CVEs and indicator feeds published in the ACN bulletin [5]. ACN's guidance to remove exposed administrative consoles, administrative APIs, and CI/CD interfaces from the public internet [5] is a useful addition to the BACS list.

Short-Term Mitigations

Over the next one to three months, organisations should change their patch management processes so that the 24-hour target becomes a sustainable operating standard and not an emergency response. In practice, that means separating internet-facing assets into their own patch tier with pre-approved change windows and automated deployment. Least-privilege reviews should focus on accounts reachable from exposed systems, since an agent that obtains one credential will try to escalate and move

laterally [5]. Behavioural detection should be tuned for agentic patterns. ACN highlights bursts of administrative API calls, connections from DMZ hosts to Kerberos, LDAP, or SMB services, and traffic to tunnelling or out-of-band testing services [5].

SMEs should consider whether a managed security or managed detection and response provider can meet response times their internal teams cannot. Contracts with IT providers should specify patch timelines for critical internet-facing vulnerabilities. Organisations of all sizes should follow BACS's advice to run regular penetration tests [1]. Using agentic testing tools themselves, under proper authorisation, would show them what an adversary's agent would find.

Strategic Considerations

Over the longer term, the Swiss cases strengthen the case for architectures that assume credential compromise and limit an attacker's ability to move once inside. Zero Trust segmentation between IT and operational technology, short-lived credentials, and immutable or offline backups [5] all reduce what a fast-moving agent can achieve after initial access. Policymakers should weigh Reischuk's argument for collective SME support [2], along with the visibility gap created by voluntary SME reporting. Without better data on SME compromises, national threat pictures will likely undercount agentic activity.

Security leaders should also brief boards that the economics of opportunistic attack have shifted. Risk acceptance decisions made on the assumption that attackers would not bother with low-value or obscure systems need revisiting, because agentic frameworks make it cheap to search for every exposed weakness at once. Finally, organisations that deploy their own AI agents, defensive or otherwise, should govern them as carefully as they defend against hostile ones. The same frameworks serve both purposes, and an over-permissioned internal agent is itself an attack surface.

CSA Resource Alignment

The closest CSA precedent is the **Hugging Face Incident Initial Post-Mortem** [9], a CISO-authored analysis of the July 2026 incident, which the post-mortem characterises as "the first publicly documented autonomous AI attack" [9]. The Swiss cases are notable for a different reason: they are the first agentic intrusions confirmed by a national government authority in Switzerland, not the first agentic intrusions anywhere. That document's time-phased roadmap (weekly, monthly, and quarterly actions), its treatment of machine-speed incident response, and its emphasis on deception technology and credential management apply directly to the Swiss cases. The Swiss disclosure extends the post-mortem's lessons in an important direction: from a single high-profile technology platform to multiple ordinary organisations,

including utilities and SMEs, compromised through basic hygiene failures. CSA's companion research note, **Hugging Face's Autonomous AI Agent Breach** [10], maps agentic-attacker incidents to tiered Immediate, Short-Term, and Strategic recommendations, the structure this note also follows.

Two further CSA publications address the threat class directly. The white paper **Autonomous Agentic AI Adversaries** [11] examines autonomous offensive agents as an operational reality and provides context for the frameworks BACS and ACN name. The research note **Fingerprinting Agent-Operated Intrusions: Detection and Response Guidance** [12] supports the detection challenges discussed above, including BACS's recommendation to watch for changes in behaviour and data volumes.

For critical infrastructure operators, CSA's **Zero Trust Guidance for Critical Infrastructure** [13] applies Zero Trust principles to operational technology and industrial control system environments. Its guidance on segmentation and protect-surface definition addresses the main question the Swiss cases leave open: whether an agent that compromises a utility's IT perimeter can reach operational systems.

The **AI Controls Matrix (AICM) v1.1** [14] provides the control baseline for operationalising these recommendations. Its Threat and Vulnerability Management domain covers the patch timeliness BACS now demands, and its Identity and Access Management domain covers the MFA and least-privilege measures. AICM also covers governance of organisations' own AI agents, which matters given the dual-use nature of the frameworks involved. Finally, CSA's **MAESTRO** agentic threat modelling framework [15] gives security teams a structured way to model the multi-agent attack architectures described in the ACN bulletin, from coordinator agents to specialised exploitation and persistence agents. They can then use those models to test defences against agentic adversaries, not only human ones.

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