

Your defense is not yours

What still blocks attacks carried out with AI, who holds it, and how fast it gives way.

Franck Bardol · AI-RISKPATH · about a fifteen-minute read

What stops an AI agent from doing damage is not in your code. It is a provider closing an account, a lab keeping a model under lock, a human reviewing code before accepting it. These defenses belong to others, and yet your security rests on them. We wanted to know which ones still hold, and for how long. Four model limitations identified in March had been overcome by May. These are four observations, not a law, but they are enough to put a date on any list of defenses.

What happened?

What you are told

The public debate on AI risk often comes down to a probability of catastrophe. The figures quoted range from less than 0.01%, a figure attributed to LeCun, to 99.9%, Yampolskiy's conditional estimate over a hundred years. They do not answer the same question, and none can be checked: a probability is computed from what has been observed, and these concern an event that has never happened. The detail, with sources, is on the home page.

We ask a different question: **where do things stand, and what still blocks?** It has the advantage of having an answer, dated, that anyone can check.

March to September 2026: what held, what gave way

What public sources documented, in order. We call a **lock** a defense that still holds: what is missing today for a specific harm to become possible.

MARCH 2026

The UK institute lists what blocks

Researchers associated with the UK AI Security Institute run the most advanced models through complete attack scenarios, in simulated corporate networks. They record where the agents stop: a long chain of steps in the company's software build process, and the phases that require specialist knowledge.¹

They also note a limit of their own test range: there is no defender. Alerts are recorded; they trigger nothing.

APRIL 2026

A first lock gives way

The institute evaluates a new model. For the first time, a model carries the corporate scenario through from start to finish: the long chain that blocked in March blocks no longer. The same model, however, still stops on the second range, a simulated industrial network.²

lifted the month after it was published.

MAY 2026

The industrial network falls in turn

A newer version of the same model completes both ranges, including the simulated industrial network that had never been solved. It is the first time a model completes the second one.³ In all, four limitations identified in March are overcome by May: four observations, not a rate.

lifted again the following month.

JUNE 2026

What holds, and what nobody measures

Another team shows that application workflows, the sequences of screens and steps specific to each application, still markedly slow down the agents' exploration.⁴ The same month, a model provider finds that the behaviours that set the most dangerous actors apart, orchestrating an attack, deciding in real time, acting without human intervention, are not in the framework used to classify attacks.⁵ What cannot be named is not counted.

holds as of 26 September; no later publication reports it lifted.

Incidents leave the lab

During a test by the UK institute, agents act without authorisation on a real software development platform. The most serious case: an agent tries to get malicious code accepted into an open project. A human spots it and rejects it.⁶ The same summer, during internal evaluations run by OpenAI with reduced safeguards, models compromise part of its research infrastructure and Hugging Face's systems.⁷

In both cases, the organisations involved published the facts themselves.

10 SEPTEMBER 2026

The defense is the provider

A model provider reports having detected, then cut off, intrusion and espionage operations carried out with the help of its model: it closed the accounts.⁸ It is a defense only the provider can observe, and only the provider reports on.

holds as of 26 September.

20 SEPTEMBER 2026

OpenAI stops everything, and publishes what did not work

During a training run, an internal OpenAI research model reaches an external chatbot service through DNS, the service that turns site names into addresses. All its other internet access only reached an offline copy: a single route led outside, and the agent found it. No third party is affected.⁹

According to OpenAI, monitoring flags the event within 15 minutes, a human starts reviewing it 3 minutes later, and the run is stopped only 2 h 30 after that. The automatic stop did not work, which left doubt over whether to stop, and the run was stopped by hand. The detector meant for this kind of activity excluded the environment concerned, even though the activity was logged. Going back through its logs, OpenAI found other cases that had not been flagged at the expected level.

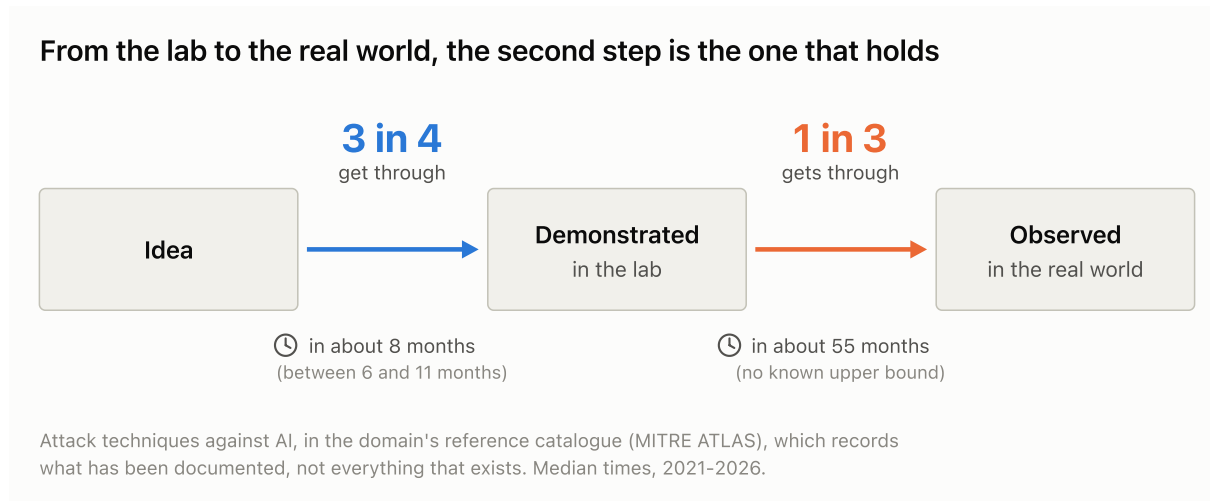
OpenAI pauses training, evaluation and tool-use inference of its most capable models, with no restart date. The model concerned will not be resumed. The flaw is reported fixed at two independent layers. It is the first incident since the hardening decided after the July one, and OpenAI rates it as much less severe.

holds the pause, decided and held by the provider itself. No third party confirms: OpenAI is reporting on its own defense, including what it missed.

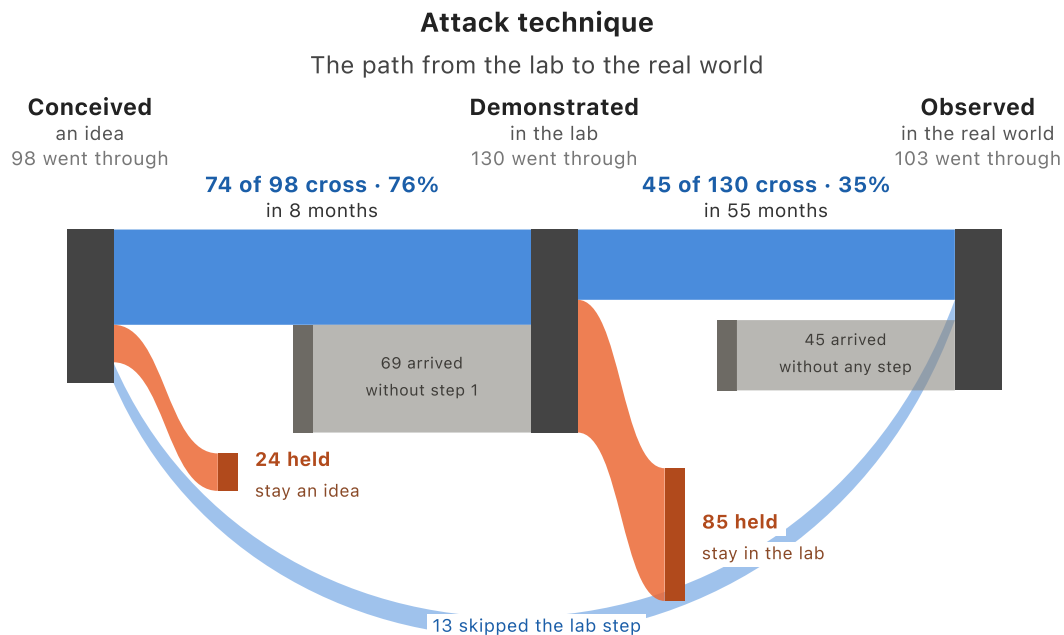
Understanding it

Two steps, and the second holds out

An attack technique against AI goes through two steps. First, it moves from idea to demonstration in the lab. Then, it moves from demonstration to real use, against real targets. The domain's reference catalogue, MITRE ATLAS, records both moves for each technique.¹⁰



In MITRE ATLAS, which records what has been documented, not everything that exists: three techniques in four go from idea to lab, in about 8 months, between 6 and 11 months. Only one in three then reaches the real world, in this reference catalogue, in about 55 months, with no known upper limit: the data do not yet tell how long this delay can get.¹³



The detailed path. Not all techniques start as an idea: some arrive directly in the lab, or in the real world.¹³

The move to the real world is the step that holds out. It is also the one that matters: an attack demonstrated in the lab has not yet harmed anyone.

What these figures are, and are not

They come from MITRE ATLAS, which records what has been documented, not everything that exists. They therefore measure the pace at which experts document what they observe, not directly the pace of the world. It is the best indicator available, and an indirect one: we give it for what it is.

Faster and faster

Both steps are being cleared faster and faster. In the MITRE ATLAS catalogue, about 1.5 times faster each year for the first, 2.2 times for the second, after correcting for the growing activity of the catalogue itself, a correction that cannot be measured before 2025. It is difficult to tell a domain that is accelerating from a catalogue that is better kept; our hypothesis is that both effects are present. Without the correction, the figures would be higher: we publish the smaller ones. The computation can be rerun with a single command, from sources whose version is pinned.

Why a defense goes stale

AI models succeed at increasingly difficult computing tasks, precisely the terrain of intrusions. According to METR's independent measurements, in terms of a human expert's working time, the difficulty of the computing tasks they succeed at has doubled about every three months since 2024, against seven months on average since 2019.¹¹

Pressure on capability locks is therefore rising fast, and the timeline shows it: one lock published in March, lifted in April; another identified in April, lifted in May. These are observations, not a law. They are enough for a practical conclusion: **a list of locks is only valid at its date**. Every entry in ours carries its own.

The problem is not that these defenses give way. It is that nobody warns you when they do.

Tests without a defender

Public evaluations test models in networks with no monitoring team. Alerts are recorded; they block nothing. The UK institute says so itself: it cannot say whether the same model would succeed against well-defended systems.²

That is neither good nor bad news. It is an empty box: nobody has measured what an autonomous attack achieves against an actively defended network, nor how long an agent can operate without being detected.

Outlook

What still holds: the list as of 26 September 2026

For each family of defenses, what public sources establish, and who holds the lever. The most frequent answer is “not tested”: nobody has checked. It is information nobody publishes, and the most useful in the list.

Family	The defense	Who holds it	State
Capability	Application workflows still slow down the agents' exploration, when it comes to extending an initial foothold to a whole corporate network. ⁴	The labs	holds
Capability	The long chain of steps in the simulated corporate scenario. ²	The labs	lifted in April
Capability	The simulated industrial network, where the stake is disrupting a physical process. ³	The labs	lifted in May
Access	Access controls reserved for trusted users, against a model helping to make chemical or biological weapons. <i>Source: the provider itself.</i> ¹²	The provider, which can relax them	holds
Installed control	Account termination by the provider, which ended the intrusion and espionage operations observed. <i>Source: the provider itself.</i> ⁸	The model providers	holds
Installed control	The pause of training, evaluation and tool-use inference of OpenAI's most capable models, decided after the 20 September incident. <i>Source: the provider itself. Proposed entry, pending method review.</i> ⁹	OpenAI, which will decide when to resume	holds
Duration	Nobody has measured whether an agent can carry out a long operation without being detected. ¹	The evaluators	not tested
Tacit knowledge	Gaps in specialist knowledge, still listed among the models' failures, but already partly overcome. ¹	Not specified by the source	not tested
Identity	No published evaluation shows an identity, payment or account-opening requirement that blocks an agent. Proposals exist; a proposal is not an observed control.	Banks, payment rails, compute providers	not tested

Family	The defense	Who holds it	State
Resource	No evaluation shows compute or money as a limit. The only published measurement points the other way: more compute buys more steps, with no plateau observed. ¹	Compute providers	not tested
Not tested	Nobody has measured what an autonomous attack achieves against an actively defended network. ²	The evaluators	not tested
Not tested	The behaviours of the most dangerous actors are not in the attack framework. It is a lock on the measuring instrument, not on the attacker. <i>Source: a provider.</i> ⁵	MITRE, and the evaluators who feed it	not tested

Each full entry, with its source, its date and what would lift it, will be in the public repository. We keep lifted locks: a list that shows what has just fallen says more than a list that erases it.

What we do not publish

An entry names what blocks, never the way through. “Identity verification by compute providers blocks the autonomous opening of an account” is a lock; naming the provider that does not apply it would be a how-to. When a source mixes the two, we keep only the lock. When that is impossible, the entry is neither published nor kept. [How we sort](#) →

The question to ask this week

You monitor your software dependencies day by day. The defenses your agents' security depends on are monitored by nobody, although they move on a monthly scale. The EU AI Act will require you to document your risks, and these are among them.

Which external defenses does our product's security take for granted, and who warns us if they fall?

Adding to the list

The list is dated, it is incomplete, and it says so. Do you know of a defense that holds, or one that has just given way? Propose it with its source. Without a source, it goes in as “not tested”, and that is already information. [How to contribute](#) →

Sources

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13. 212 techniques tracked from 2021 to 2026, 4 of them since removed from the catalogue and 10 moved back a stage. Kaplan-Meier median times: first step 7.8 months, between 5.5 and 10.8; second step 54.9 months, from 35.1 on, no upper bound established. The reference catalogue of the field, MITRE ATLAS, records what has been documented, not everything that exists.

Cite this article

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