

Whitepaper #05: Agentic Architectures in Secure Enclaves

Subtitle: Multi-Agent Systems for Zero-Egress Environments

Author: Dustin J. Ober, PMP

1. Executive Summary

The Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF): The AI industry is rapidly shifting from single-model inference to **multi-agent orchestration**—systems where specialized AI agents collaborate autonomously to complete complex tasks. Frameworks like LangGraph, AutoGen, and CrewAI power this revolution, enabling agents to use tools, maintain state, and coordinate without constant human intervention.

The Core Problem: These agentic frameworks assume ubiquitous cloud connectivity. They rely on external APIs for web search, code execution sandboxes, and managed databases for state persistence. For organizations operating under Zero Trust mandates, air-gapped networks, or strict data sovereignty requirements, deploying such systems presents fundamental architectural challenges:

- Tool use requires external API calls (web search, code interpreters)
- State management depends on cloud services (Redis, DynamoDB)
- Agent routing often relies on LLM decisions—creating unpredictable attack surfaces
- Standard tutorials and tooling ignore disconnected environment constraints

The Solution: This whitepaper presents a reference architecture for deploying **LangGraph-style multi-agent workflows** inside secure enclaves. We introduce the ****Sovereign Agent Framework (SAF)****—a pattern library covering local tool orchestration, sandboxed execution, human-in-the-loop checkpoints, encrypted state management, and defense-in-depth security. Organizations adopting these patterns can harness agentic AI's operational power while maintaining complete data sovereignty.

2. The Operational Challenge: Why "Agentic" is Harder Than "Chat"

Deploying a chatbot is straightforward: send a prompt, receive a response, display it. Deploying an *agentic* system introduces an entirely new class of complexity.

2.1 The Shift from Inference to Orchestration

Paradigm	Complexity	Dependencies	Attack Surface
Chat (WP-01-04)	Low	Model + Context	Prompt injection
RAG Pipeline	Medium	Model + VectorDB + Retriever	Data poisoning
Agentic System	High	Model + Tools + State + Planner	Tool misuse, runaway loops, privilege escalation

An agentic system is not simply a chat interface with tools bolted on—it is an **autonomous decision-making loop** capable of taking real actions on your infrastructure. The agent observes, plans, acts, and evaluates in a continuous cycle. Each capability introduces new failure modes and attack vectors.

2.2 The "Tool Use" Problem in Zero-Egress Environments

The power of agentic systems comes from tool use. The agent can search the web, execute code, query databases, and send communications. However, typical agentic tools assume connectivity:

- `WebSearch` → Requires internet access
- `PythonREPL` → Arbitrary code execution (security risk)

- `SQLQuery` → Direct database exposure
- `SendEmail` → Egress violation

The Challenge: How do we enable *useful* tool execution while maintaining zero-egress and zero-trust policies? The answer lies in **capability tiering, sandboxed execution, and explicit approval workflows**—patterns we will detail in Sections 5 and 6.

2.3 The State Persistence Dilemma

Agents require memory across conversation turns and even across sessions:

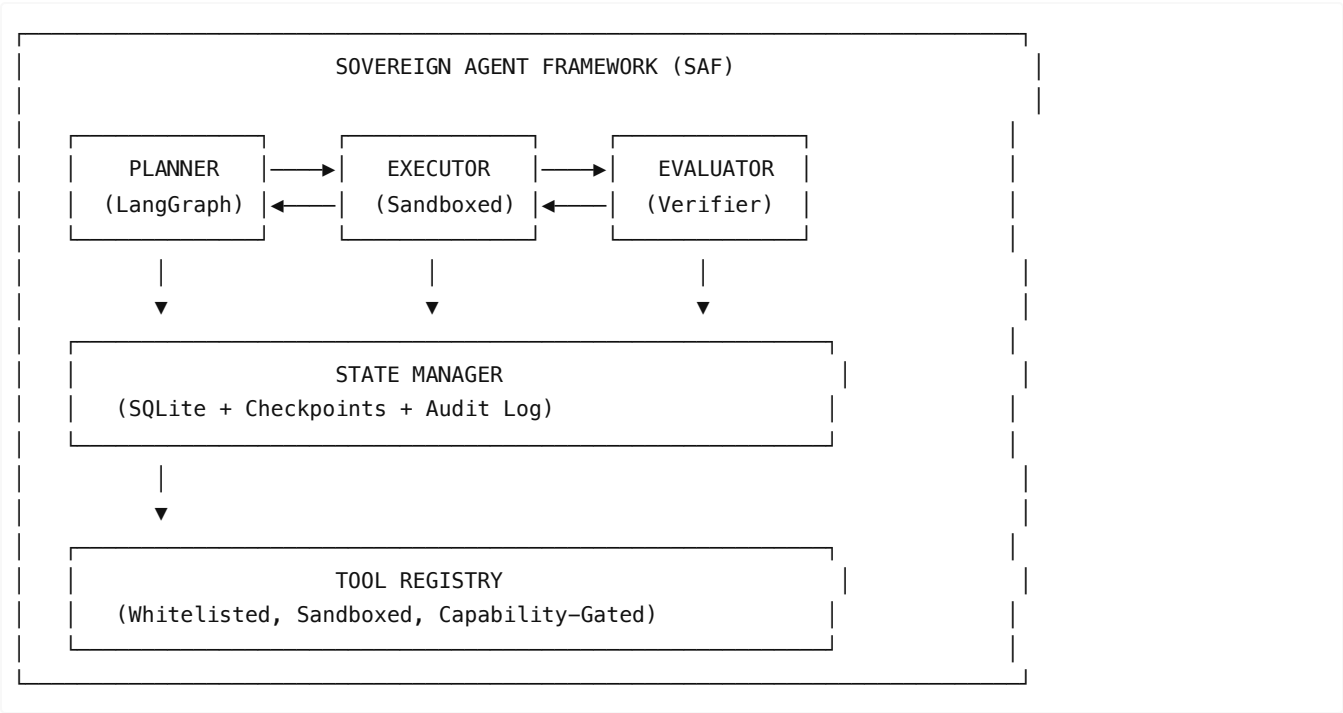
- **Short-term memory:** Current conversation context and recent observations
- **Long-term memory:** User preferences, learned patterns, task history
- **Checkpoint state:** Rollback points for error recovery and audit trails

Cloud-native solutions (Redis, managed Postgres, Firebase) are unavailable in air-gapped environments. We must architect **local state management** that is durable, encrypted, and auditable—without sacrificing the stateful capabilities that make agents useful.

3. Reference Architecture: The Sovereign Agent Framework (SAF)

The Sovereign Agent Framework (SAF) provides a blueprint for deploying agentic AI in disconnected, high-security environments.

3.1 High-Level Architecture



3.2 Component Breakdown

Component	Role	Sovereign Implementation
Planner	Decides the next action based on state and goals	LangGraph graph with explicit nodes and edges
Executor	Runs approved actions in isolated environments	Containerized micro-VM (gVisor or Firecracker)

Evaluator	Validates outputs before returning to user	Citation checker + output filter pipeline
State Manager	Persists conversation, checkpoints, and audit data	Encrypted SQLite with custom schema
Tool Registry	Controls which capabilities are available	YAML manifest with tier-based capability gates

The key architectural principle: **every component is local, auditable, and operates under explicit constraints**. There are no implicit cloud dependencies or "magic" LLM routing decisions for sensitive operations.

4. Core Pattern #1: Explicit Graph Definitions (No Implicit Routing)

4.1 The Security Problem with Implicit Routing

Many agentic frameworks advertise "let the LLM decide which tool to call" as a feature. The model receives a list of available tools and autonomously selects the appropriate one based on the user's intent.

The Risk: This design is fundamentally at odds with Zero Trust principles. A prompt injection attack could manipulate the model into:

- Routing to a dangerous tool that should require approval
- Skipping security checkpoints entirely
- Invoking tools in unexpected sequences

In secure environments, we cannot allow an LLM to make routing decisions for sensitive operations.

4.2 The Solution: Declarative State Machines

LangGraph allows us to define agent workflows as **explicit state machines**. Every node (action) and edge (transition) is declared in code—not decided by the model at runtime.

```
from langgraph.graph import StateGraph, END
from typing import TypedDict
from langchain_core.messages import BaseMessage

class SecureAgentState(TypedDict):
    messages: list[BaseMessage]
    current_step: str
    approved_tools: list[str]
    audit_trail: list[dict]

# Create the workflow graph
workflow = StateGraph(SecureAgentState)

# Explicit node definitions
workflow.add_node("analyze_query", analyze_query_node)
workflow.add_node("retrieve_context", retrieve_context_node)
workflow.add_node("human_checkpoint", human_approval_node)
workflow.add_node("execute_action", sandboxed_execution_node)
workflow.add_node("validate_output", output_validation_node)

# Explicit edge definitions (no LLM routing)
workflow.add_edge("analyze_query", "retrieve_context")
workflow.add_edge("retrieve_context", "human_checkpoint")
workflow.add_conditional_edges(
```

```
    "human_checkpoint",
    lambda state: "execute" if state["approved"] else "reject",
    {"execute": "execute_action", "reject": END}
)
workflow.add_edge("execute_action", "validate_output")
workflow.add_edge("validate_output", END)
```

4.3 Key Principles for Secure Graph Design

1. **No LLM-based routing for sensitive transitions.** The model may generate content, but it does not choose which path the workflow takes.
2. **All paths through the graph are enumerable and auditable.** Security teams can review every possible execution sequence.
3. **Human checkpoints are mandatory for state-changing actions.** The graph physically cannot skip approval nodes.

5. Core Pattern #2: Sandboxed Tool Execution

5.1 The Tool Taxonomy for Secure Environments

Not all tools carry equal risk. We classify tools into tiers based on their potential impact:

Tier	Risk Level	Examples	Execution Model
T1: Read-Only	Low	RAG retrieval, document search, calculations	Direct execution in main process
T2: Compute	Medium	Code interpretation, data transformation	Sandboxed container with resource limits
T3: State-Changing	High	Database writes, file modifications	Human-in-the-loop approval required
T4: External	Prohibited	Web search, external API calls	Blocked at network layer

5.2 Implementing the Sandbox Layer

For Tier 2 (Compute) tools, we execute within isolated environments that cannot affect the host system or access the network.

Option A: gVisor (Recommended for Production)

gVisor is a Linux-compatible application kernel that provides an additional layer of isolation:

- Kernel-level isolation without full VM overhead
- No root privileges required for execution
- Sub-100ms startup time

```
# Running Python code in gVisor sandbox
runc --rootless --network none python3 untrusted_script.py
```

Option B: Firecracker micro-VMs

For maximum isolation (e.g., executing truly untrusted code):

- Full virtual machine isolation
- ~125ms startup overhead
- Used by AWS Lambda and Fly.io

5.3 Tool Manifest Configuration

Tools are defined in a YAML registry that specifies their tier, sandbox requirements, and approval workflows:

```
# tool_registry.yaml
tools:
  - name: "document_search"
    tier: T1
    enabled: true
    sandbox: false
    description: "Search internal document corpus via RAG"

  - name: "python_calculator"
    tier: T2
    enabled: true
    sandbox: true
    sandbox_config:
      runtime: gvisor
      timeout_ms: 5000
      memory_limit_mb: 256
      allowed_imports: ["math", "statistics", "datetime"]
      network: disabled

  - name: "database_write"
    tier: T3
    enabled: true
    requires_approval: true
    approval_roles: ["analyst_l2", "system_admin"]
    approval_timeout_min: 30

  - name: "web_search"
    tier: T4
    enabled: false
    block_reason: "Zero-egress network policy"
```

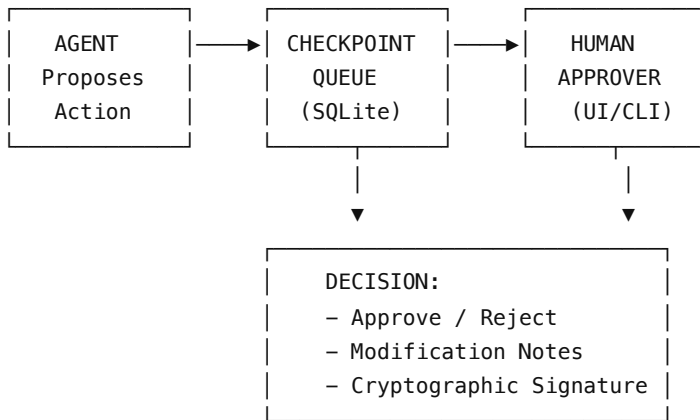
6. Core Pattern #3: Human-in-the-Loop Checkpoints

6.1 The Mandate for Human Oversight

In classified and compliance-heavy environments, fully autonomous agents are typically **not acceptable**. Regulatory frameworks and organizational policies require human oversight for:

- Any action that modifies persistent state
- Any output intended for external distribution
- Any decision with significant operational impact
- Any situation where the agent expresses uncertainty

6.2 Checkpoint Architecture



When an agent reaches a checkpoint node, execution **halts**. The proposed action is persisted to a queue, and a human reviewer receives notification. Only after explicit approval does the workflow continue.

6.3 Checkpoint Types

Type	Trigger	Timeout Behavior
Synchronous	T3 tool invocation	Block until approval or configurable timeout (fail-safe: reject)
Asynchronous	Batch report generation	Queue for review; workflow continues on non-critical path
Emergency	Anomaly detection triggered	Halt all processing; alert security team

6.4 Implementation Example

```
async def human_approval_node(state: SecureAgentState) -> SecureAgentState:
    """Pause execution and await human approval."""

    checkpoint = Checkpoint(
        action=state["proposed_action"],
        context=state["messages"][-3:], # Last 3 messages for context
        requested_tools=state["requested_tools"],
        timestamp=datetime.utcnow(),
        approver_required="analyst_l2", # Role-based approval
        classification=state.get("classification_level", "UNCLASSIFIED")
    )

    # Persist to checkpoint queue
    checkpoint_id = await checkpoint_store.save(checkpoint)

    # Notify approver (internal message queue, email, or dashboard alert)
    await notify_approvers(checkpoint_id, checkpoint.approver_required)

    # Wait for human decision (with configurable timeout)
    decision = await checkpoint_store.await_decision(
        checkpoint_id,
        timeout_minutes=30
    )
```

```

if decision.approved:
    state["approved_tools"] = decision.approved_tools
    state["audit_trail"].append(decision.to_audit_record())
    return state
else:
    raise AgentHaltedException(
        f"Action rejected by {decision.approver_id}: {decision.reason}"
    )

```

7. Core Pattern #4: Local State Management

7.1 The State Schema

Unlike cloud-native agents that rely on managed databases, we use **SQLite** with a purpose-built schema for agentic workloads. SQLite provides:

- Zero network dependencies
- Single-file deployment
- ACID transactions
- Encryption at rest (via SQLCipher)

```

-- Agent session persistence
CREATE TABLE agent_sessions (
    session_id TEXT PRIMARY KEY,
    user_id TEXT NOT NULL,
    created_at TIMESTAMP DEFAULT CURRENT_TIMESTAMP,
    last_active TIMESTAMP,
    state_json TEXT NOT NULL, -- Serialized LangGraph state
    classification_level TEXT NOT NULL,
    CONSTRAINT valid_classification CHECK (
        classification_level IN ('UNCLASSIFIED', 'CUI', 'SECRET', 'TOP_SECRET')
    )
);

-- Checkpoint queue for human-in-the-loop approvals
CREATE TABLE checkpoints (
    checkpoint_id TEXT PRIMARY KEY,
    session_id TEXT REFERENCES agent_sessions(session_id),
    proposed_action TEXT NOT NULL,
    proposed_tools TEXT, -- JSON array of requested tools
    status TEXT DEFAULT 'pending',
    approver_id TEXT,
    decision_timestamp TIMESTAMP,
    decision_notes TEXT,
    CONSTRAINT valid_status CHECK (
        status IN ('pending', 'approved', 'rejected', 'expired')
    )
);

-- Immutable, hash-chained audit log
CREATE TABLE audit_log (

```

```

log_id INTEGER PRIMARY KEY AUTOINCREMENT,
session_id TEXT NOT NULL,
event_type TEXT NOT NULL,
event_data TEXT NOT NULL,
actor_id TEXT NOT NULL,
timestamp TIMESTAMP DEFAULT CURRENT_TIMESTAMP,
previous_hash TEXT NOT NULL,
current_hash TEXT NOT NULL -- SHA256(previous_hash + event_data)
);

```

7.2 Encrypted Checkpointing

LangGraph provides native checkpointing via `SqliteSaver`. For sovereign environments, we wrap this with encryption:

```

from langgraph.checkpoint.sqlite import SqliteSaver
from cryptography.fernet import Fernet
import json

class EncryptedCheckpointer(SqliteSaver):
    """SQLite checkpointer with at-rest encryption for sovereign deployments."""

    def __init__(self, db_path: str, encryption_key: bytes):
        super().__init__(db_path)
        self.cipher = Fernet(encryption_key)

    def put(self, config: dict, checkpoint: dict) -> None:
        """Encrypt and persist checkpoint."""
        serialized = json.dumps(checkpoint).encode('utf-8')
        encrypted = self.cipher.encrypt(serialized)
        return super().put(config, {"encrypted_state": encrypted.decode()})

    def get(self, config: dict) -> dict | None:
        """Retrieve and decrypt checkpoint."""
        encrypted_record = super().get(config)
        if encrypted_record and "encrypted_state" in encrypted_record:
            decrypted = self.cipher.decrypt(
                encrypted_record["encrypted_state"].encode()
            )
            return json.loads(decrypted)
        return None

```

7.3 Hash-Chained Audit Logs

Every audit entry includes a cryptographic hash of the previous entry, creating a tamper-evident chain:

```

import hashlib

def append_audit_log(session_id: str, event_type: str, event_data: dict, actor_id: str):
    """Append an entry to the hash-chained audit log."""

    # Get the hash of the previous entry
    previous = db.execute(

```



```

        "SELECT current_hash FROM audit_log ORDER BY log_id DESC LIMIT 1"
    ).fetchone()
    previous_hash = previous["current_hash"] if previous else "GENESIS"

    # Compute current hash
    payload = f'{{previous_hash}}|{json.dumps(event_data, sort_keys=True)}'
    current_hash = hashlib.sha256(payload.encode()).hexdigest()

    # Insert the new log entry
    db.execute("""
        INSERT INTO audit_log
        (session_id, event_type, event_data, actor_id, previous_hash, current_hash)
        VALUES (?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?)
    """, (session_id, event_type, json.dumps(event_data), actor_id, previous_hash, current_hash))

```

8. Security Hardening: The "Defense in Depth" Model

A sovereign agentic system requires multiple overlapping security layers. If one layer fails, others contain the breach.

8.1 Layered Security Architecture

LAYER 1: INPUT VALIDATION

- Input sanitization and length limits
- Prompt injection detection (regex + ML classifier)
- Rate limiting per user/session

LAYER 2: GRAPH CONSTRAINTS

- Explicit routing (no LLM decisions on sensitive operations)
- Maximum loop iterations (prevent infinite execution)
- Tool whitelist enforcement via registry

LAYER 3: EXECUTION ISOLATION

- gVisor/Firecracker sandboxing for compute tools
- Resource limits (CPU, memory, wall-clock time)
- Network disabled in execution environment

LAYER 4: OUTPUT VALIDATION

- Citation verification (claims must map to sources)
- Classification marking detection
- PII/sensitive data leak prevention

LAYER 5: AUDIT & MONITORING

- Immutable, hash-chained audit logs
- Real-time anomaly detection
- Prometheus/Grafana for operational visibility

8.2 Prompt Injection Defense

We implement a two-layer defense against prompt injection attacks:

Layer 1: Pattern Matching (Fast, First Pass)

```
import re

INJECTION_PATTERNS = [
    r"ignore\s+(previous|prior|above)\s+(instructions?|prompts?)",
    r"you\s+are\s+(now|actually)\s+",
    r"pretend\s+(you|to\s+be)",
    r"forget\s+(everything|all|your)",
    r"system\s*:\s*",
    r"<\s*/?system\s*>",
    r"```\s*system",
    r"ADMIN\s*MODE",
]

def detect_injection_patterns(text: str) -> list[str]:
    """Quick regex scan for known injection patterns."""
    matches = []
    for pattern in INJECTION_PATTERNS:
        if re.search(pattern, text, re.IGNORECASE):
            matches.append(pattern)
    return matches
```

Layer 2: ML Classifier (Accurate, Second Pass)

For inputs that pass pattern matching, we run a fine-tuned classifier:

- BERT-based model trained on prompt injection datasets
- Runs in parallel with main inference (non-blocking)
- Flags suspicious inputs for human review rather than blocking

8.3 Maximum Iteration Guards

Agentic loops can spiral indefinitely. We implement circuit breakers:

```
MAX_AGENT_ITERATIONS = 10 # Configurable per workflow type

async def run_agent_with_guard(workflow, initial_state: dict) -> dict:
    """Execute agent workflow with iteration limit."""
    iteration = 0
    state = initial_state

    while iteration < MAX_AGENT_ITERATIONS:
        state = await workflow.step(state)
        iteration += 1

        # Check for natural termination
        if state.get("__end__"):
            return state

        # Log iteration for monitoring
        logger.info(f"Agent iteration {iteration}/{MAX_AGENT_ITERATIONS}")
```

```
# Circuit breaker triggered
await append_audit_log(
    state["session_id"],
    "CIRCUIT_BREAKER",
    {"iterations": iteration, "final_state": state},
    "SYSTEM"
)
raise AgentRunawayException(
    f"Agent exceeded maximum iterations ({MAX_AGENT_ITERATIONS}). "
    "Execution halted for safety review."
)
```

9. Case Study: Adapting ChainReaction for Sovereign Deployment

To demonstrate these patterns in practice, we adapt **ChainReaction**—a multi-agent supply chain risk monitoring system—for sovereign deployment.

9.1 Original Architecture (Connected Environment)

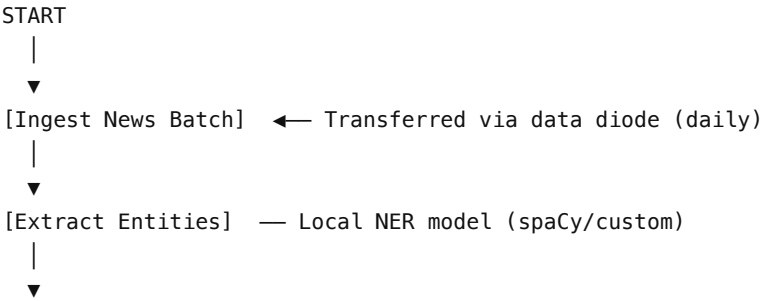
The original ChainReaction system:

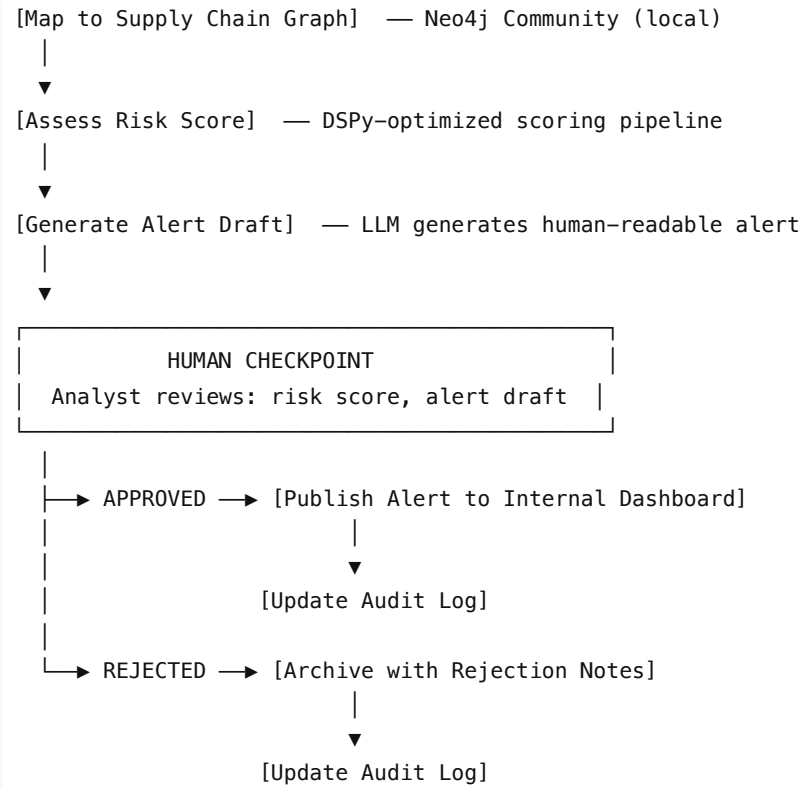
- Uses LangGraph for multi-agent orchestration
- Neo4j cloud (Aura) for supply chain graph storage
- Web search APIs for real-time news ingestion
- Redis for conversation state and caching
- LLM-based routing for agent handoffs

9.2 Sovereign Adaptation

Component	Original	Sovereign Version
News Ingestion	Web APIs (NewsAPI, Google)	Batch import via data diode
State Management	Redis Cloud	SQLite with encryption
Graph Database	Neo4j Aura	Neo4j Community Edition (local)
Agent Routing	LLM-based	Explicit graph with checkpoints
Tool Execution	Direct Python	gVisor sandboxed
Monitoring	DataDog	Prometheus + Grafana (local)

9.3 Sovereign Workflow Graph





9.4 Key Adaptations

1. **Batch News Ingestion:** Instead of real-time web search, news is imported daily via a secure data diode. The NER extraction runs on the imported batch.
2. **Local Graph Database:** Neo4j Community Edition runs on the same infrastructure as the agent. Graph queries never leave the secure network.
3. **Mandatory Human Checkpoint:** Before any alert is published (even internally), an analyst must approve. This prevents false positives from reaching stakeholders.
4. **Hash-Chained Audit:** Every decision—approval, rejection, modification—is logged with cryptographic chaining for regulatory compliance.

10. Deployment Checklist

Before deploying a Sovereign Agentic System to production, verify completion of the following:

Architecture Verification

- ☐ All agent graphs are explicitly defined (no implicit LLM routing for sensitive operations)
- ☐ Tool registry is complete with tier classification (T1-T4)
- ☐ Human-in-the-loop checkpoints exist for all T3 (state-changing) operations
- ☐ Graph topology has been reviewed by security team

Execution Security

- ☐ Sandboxed execution environment configured (gVisor or Firecracker)
- ☐ Resource limits enforced for all T2 tools (CPU, memory, time)

- ☐ Network access disabled in sandbox environments
- ☐ Maximum iteration guards implemented and tested

State Management

- ☐ SQLite schema deployed and tested
- ☐ Encryption at rest enabled (SQLCipher or wrapper)
- ☐ Checkpoint/rollback mechanisms tested with failure scenarios
- ☐ Hash-chained audit logs enabled and verified

Input/Output Security

- ☐ Prompt injection detection active (regex + classifier)
- ☐ Output validation pipeline configured
- ☐ PII/classification leak prevention tested
- ☐ Rate limiting configured per user/session

Observability

- ☐ Prometheus metrics exposed for agent performance
- ☐ Grafana dashboards configured for operational visibility
- ☐ Alert thresholds defined for anomaly detection
- ☐ Log aggregation configured (local ELK or Loki stack)

Documentation

- ☐ Runbook created for common operational scenarios
- ☐ Incident response procedures documented
- ☐ User training materials prepared
- ☐ Security assessment completed and documented

11. Conclusion

Agentic AI represents a fundamental leap from passive inference to **active decision-making**. Agents observe, plan, act, and evaluate—capabilities that unlock enormous operational value. However, in sovereign environments, this power must be carefully constrained.

The organizations that successfully deploy agentic AI in secure enclaves will follow these principles:

1. **Explicit over Implicit:** Define agent graphs declaratively. Never allow the LLM to make routing decisions for sensitive operations.
2. **Sandbox Everything:** Treat every tool execution as potentially adversarial. Isolate compute, limit resources, disable networking.
3. **Humans Stay in the Loop:** Autonomous action is a privilege earned through demonstrated reliability. Start with mandatory checkpoints; relax only with evidence.
4. **Audit Everything:** Every decision must be traceable to a source, an approver, and a timestamp. Hash-chain your logs for tamper evidence.
5. **Design for Failure:** Circuit breakers, rollbacks, and recovery procedures are not optional. Assume the agent will behave unexpectedly.

The path forward is not to avoid agentic AI—it is to architect it properly. By adopting the Sovereign Agent Framework patterns outlined in this whitepaper, organizations can harness the operational power of multi-agent systems while maintaining the security, auditability, and human oversight that mission-critical environments demand.

Next in this Series:

- **Whitepaper #06:** *The Sovereign Fine-Tuning Pipeline: Adapting Foundation Models Without Cloud GPUs*
-

12. Appendix

A. Recommended Technology Stack

Layer	Technology	Notes
Orchestration	LangGraph	Explicit state machine definition; native Python
Inference	vLLM / Ollama	Local LLM serving with OpenAI-compatible API
Sandboxing	gVisor	Kernel-level isolation; recommended for production
State	SQLite + SQLCipher	Encrypted, local persistence
Graph DB	Neo4j Community	For entity relationship workloads
Monitoring	Prometheus + Grafana	Local observability stack
Logging	Loki + Grafana	Log aggregation without cloud dependencies

B. Glossary

Term	Definition
Agentic	AI systems capable of autonomous observation, planning, action, and evaluation
Human-in-the-Loop (HITL)	Design pattern requiring human approval for critical actions
Zero-Egress	Network policy prohibiting any outbound data transmission
Checkpoint	Saved state allowing workflow pause, rollback, or recovery
Tool Tier	Classification of tools by risk level and execution requirements
Circuit Breaker	Safety mechanism that halts execution when limits are exceeded
Hash Chain	Cryptographic linking of sequential records for tamper detection

C. Further Reading

- LangGraph Documentation: langchain-ai.github.io/langgraph
 - gVisor Security Model: gvisor.dev/docs
 - DSPy Framework: dspy-docs.vercel.app
 - NIST AI Risk Management Framework: nist.gov/itl/ai-risk-management-framework
-

About the Author

Dustin J. Ober, PMP, M.Ed.

AI Developer & Technical Instructional Systems Designer

Dustin J. Ober is a specialist in the intersection of Artificial Intelligence, Instructional Strategy, and secure systems architecture. With a background spanning over two decades in the United States Air Force and defense contracting, he focuses on deploying high-impact technical solutions within mission-critical environments.

Unlike traditional developers who focus solely on code, Dustin bridges the gap between **technical capability** and **operational reality**. His expertise lies in architecting "Sovereign AI" systems—designing offline, air-gapped inference pipelines that allow organizations to leverage state-of-the-art intelligence without compromising data security or compliance.

He holds a Master of Education in Instructional Design & Technology and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP). He actively develops open-source tools for the AI community, focusing on DSPy implementation, neuro-symbolic logic, and verifiable agentic workflows.

Connect:

- **Web:** aiober.com
- **LinkedIn:** [linkedin.com/in/dustinober](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dustinober)
- **Email:** dustinober@me.com

Suggested Citation:

Ober, D. J. (2025). *Agentic Architectures in Secure Enclaves: Multi-Agent Systems for Zero-Egress Environments* (Whitepaper No. 05). AIOber Technical Insights.