Evidence that Aurora B is implicated in spindle checkpoint signalling independently of error correction

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Fidelity of chromosome segregation is ensured by a tension-dependent error correction system that prevents stabilization of incorrect chromosome–microtubule attachments. Unattached or incorrectly attached chromosomes also activate the spindle assembly checkpoint, thus delaying mitotic exit until all chromosomes are bioriented. The Aurora B kinase is widely recognized as a component of error correction. Conversely, its role in the checkpoint is controversial. Here, we report an analysis of the role of Aurora B in the spindle checkpoint under conditions believed to uncouple the effects of Aurora B inhibition on the checkpoint from those on error correction. Partial inhibition of several checkpoint and kinetochore components, including Mps1 and Ndc80, strongly synergizes with inhibition of Aurora B activity and dramatically affects the ability of cells to arrest in mitosis in the presence of spindle poisons. Thus, Aurora B might contribute to spindle checkpoint signalling independently of error correction. Our results support a model in which Aurora B is at the apex of a signalling pyramid whose sensory apparatus promotes the concomitant activation of error correction and checkpoint signalling pathways.

The EMBO Journal (2011) 30, 1508–1519. doi:10.1038/emboj.2011.70; Published online 15 March 2011

Subject Categories: cell cycle

Keywords: centromere; hesperadin; kinetochore; reversine; tension

Introduction

The metaphase-to-anaphase transition is an irreversible transition of the cell cycle. Satisfaction of the spindle assembly checkpoint and subsequent activation of the ubiquitin ligase anaphase promoting complex/cyclosome (APC/C) ultimately lead to the destruction of cyclin B and securin, causing mitotic exit and sister chromatid separation (Musacchio and Salmon, 2007). To be accurate, chromosome segregation requires that all sister chromatid pairs are bioriented, which implies that the two sister chromatids of each chromosome are bound to opposite spindle poles.

Kinetochore link chromosomes to microtubules (Cheeseman and Desai, 2008; Santaguida and Musacchio, 2009). The so-called KMN network (from the initials of its Knl1, Mis12 and Ndc80 subcomplexes), a 10-subunit assembly, provides the microtubule-binding interface of kinetochores (Cheeseman et al., 2006; DeLuca et al., 2006). Kinetochores host an error correction mechanism that clears improper kinetochore–microtubule attachments. The observation that syntelic attachments (both kinetochores bound to the same pole) are intrinsically unstable, unless tension is artificially exercised on them, led to propose that tension is required to stabilize kinetochore–microtubule attachments (Nicklas and Koch, 1969).

Aurora B (Ipl1 in Saccharomyces cerevisiae), a serine/threonine (S/T) kinase, is a subunit of a chromosome passenger complex that is recruited to centromeres during mitosis (Carma et al., 2009). Aurora B is a crucial component of a tension sensor at centromeres and kinetochores and its depletion or inhibition results in the accumulation of malattachments (Biggins and Murray, 2001; Tanaka et al., 2002).

Kinetochores also host the spindle assembly checkpoint, whose effector, the mitotic checkpoint complex (MCC), prevents APC/C activation until all chromosomes have bioriented (reviewed in Musacchio and Salmon, 2007). Checkpoint components include kinases, such as Bub1, BubR1, Mps1 and Prp4, as well as protein–protein interaction components, such as Mad1, Mad2 and the Rod–Zwilch–Zw10 complex (RZZ) (Musacchio and Salmon, 2007). Within the MCC, Mad2, Bub3 and BubR1 form a complex with Cdc20, an APC/C co-activator required for targeting crucial APC/C substrates at the metaphase–anaphase transition. When engaged in the MCC, Cdc20 is unable to target its substrates, so that entry into anaphase becomes inhibited (Musacchio and Salmon, 2007).

The exact relationship between tension-dependent error correction and checkpoint status is elusive (Khodjakov and Rieder, 2009; Nezi and Musacchio, 2009; Santaguida and Musacchio, 2009; Khodjakov and Pines, 2010; Lampson and Cheeseman, 2010; Maresca and Salmon, 2010). It has been proposed that the spindle checkpoint is exquisitely sensitive to microtubule attachment, regardless of whether the attachment is under tension (Khodjakov and Rieder, 2009;
Regardless of which camp is chosen, it is generally agreed that microtubules are required for creating attachment and tension, so that in their absence (e.g. in the presence of microtubule-depolymerizing agents such as nocodazole), the checkpoint cannot be satisfied. This allowed the development of a test to assess models 1 and 2. The original implementation of this test was utilized to conclude that Ipl1/Aurora B is not involved in the checkpoint response from unattached kinetochores in *S. cerevisiae* (Biggins and Murray, 2001) (Figure 1C and D). In brief, the goal of the test is to combine inhibition of Aurora B with microtubule depolymerization by spindle poisons. In case of model 1, this predicts that the checkpoint should work normally under these conditions, because the function of Aurora B in the creation of unattached kinetochores during error correction is bypassed by microtubule depolymerization. Conversely, loss of potency of the checkpoint response when inhibiting Aurora B in the presence of unattached kinetochores would confirm an intrinsic role in the checkpoint independently of error correction (Figure 1C and D). Despite the availability of this assay, however, the controversy continued to flourish, largely because the precise conditions to neutralize the effects from impaired error correction on the checkpoint response when inhibiting Aurora B have not been standardized, and the results accumulated apparently in support of each of the two competing hypotheses (Biggins and Murray, 2001; Kallio et al., 2002; Ditchfield et al., 2003; Hau et al., 2003; Petersen and Hagan, 2003; King et al., 2007; Vader et al., 2007; Vanoosthuyse and Hardwick, 2009).

Recently, however, it was shown that a rigorous assessment of whether Aurora B is implicated in checkpoint signaling through the test in Figure 1 requires that microtubules are completely removed, which is only true at very high concentrations of microtubule-depolymerizing drugs (Yang et al., 2009). By definition, the checkpoint cannot be satisfied at very high concentrations of microtubule-depolymerizing agents (as there are no microtubules left), providing a condition for assessing the role of Aurora B in the checkpoint independently from its effects on error correction. At suboptimal concentrations of spindle poisons, residual microtubules contribute to checkpoint satisfaction when the error correction function of Aurora B is inhibited, therefore accelerating mitotic exit (Yang et al., 2009).

The study concluded that previous positive evidence supporting an involvement of Aurora B in the checkpoint independently of error correction was biased by insufficient concentrations of microtubule-depolymerizing agents (Yang et al., 2009). In a previous characterization of the effects of hesperadin, potent small-molecule inhibitor of Aurora B, on checkpoint duration, an inhibitor concentration of 100 nM was typically used (Ditchfield et al., 2003; Hau et al., 2003). At this concentration of hesperadin, there is a strong dependence of mitotic duration on nocodazole concentration, with cells living mitosis much more rapidly at low nocodazole concentrations than at high-nocodazole concentrations (Hau et al., 2003; Yang et al., 2009).

An undemonstrated assumption in many studies with small-molecule inhibitors, including those with Aurora B, is that the enzymatic activity of the target is completely inhibited at the typical concentrations of inhibitors used, or any-
way that residual activity is insufficient to sustain the normal function of the enzyme. Here, we decided to adopt the rigorous framework offered by the addition of high-nocodazole concentrations to re-evaluate the effects of Aurora B inhibitors on the spindle assembly checkpoint. Our results are consistent with a role of Aurora B in checkpoint signalling independently of error correction.

Results and discussion

Effects on mitotic arrest from inhibiting Aurora B in low or high nocodazole

It has been argued that the duration of the mitotic arrest in the presence of 100 nM hesperadin (Hauf et al, 2003) may depend on the concentration of nocodazole (Yang et al, 2009). We confirmed this result using a range of nocodazole concentrations (Figure 2A). At low nocodazole concentrations, HeLa cells concomitantly treated with 100 nM hesperadin left mitosis significantly more rapidly than at high-nocodazole concentrations. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that inhibition of error correction in the presence of residual microtubules reduces the duration of the mitotic arrest by satisfying the spindle checkpoint (Yang et al, 2009).

As expected, the increase in the duration of mitotic arrest saturates at high concentrations of nocodazole (Figure 2A). Based on these observations, and in line with Yang et al (2009), we opted to use nocodazole at 3.3 μM as a working concentration under which it can be safely assumed that checkpoint satisfaction is virtually impossible due to complete depolymerization of microtubules. At this concentration of nocodazole, tubulin appears completely diffuse (Yang et al, 2009; Santaguida et al, 2010). Furthermore, the duration of the mitotic arrest in the presence of 100 nM hesperadin increased very modestly at higher concentrations of nocodazole in comparison to the duration of 3.3 μM, suggesting that this concentration largely satisfies the requirement that microtubules are depolymerized (Figure 2A). We also reasoned that growing concentrations of nocodazole might increase the risk of unspecific interference with other cellular processes (however, we demonstrate in Supplementary Figure S4 that our conclusions remain valid even at higher concentrations of nocodazole or in the presence of a different microtubule-depolymerizing agent). Based on these considerations, we consider 3.3 μM nocodazole an appropriate concentration for testing the role of Aurora B on checkpoint signalling independently of error correction.

We therefore compared the duration of the checkpoint-dependent mitotic arrest in HeLa cells treated with 0.33 and 3.3 μM nocodazole at different concentrations of hesperadin. As a control for checkpoint override, we used reversine, a bona fide ATP-competitive inhibitor of the spindle checkpoint kinase Mps1 (Santaguida et al, 2010). At both concentrations of nocodazole, we observed a strong dose-dependent effect on the duration of the mitotic arrest (Supplementary Table SI; Figure 2B). At 100 nM hesperadin, the checkpoint response was significantly but not dramatically affected, with cells undergoing override at ~700 min rather than >1100 min in control cells at high-nocodazole concentrations (Figure 2B; Supplementary Table SI) (at which point control cells usually undergo slippage, whereby they exit M-phase spontaneously despite the continued presence of checkpoint-activating offences (Brito and Rieder, 2006)). Yang et al (2009) observed even milder effects on checkpoint duration in the presence of 100 nM hesperadin at 3.2 μM nocodazole in RPE1 cells. At 0.5 and 1.0 μM hesperadin, however, we observed a very strong reduction in the duration of the checkpoint, both in low and high nocodazole. The reduction was inferior but close to that observed with 1 μM reversine (a concentration causing complete checkpoint abrogation, Supplementary Table SI and Figure 2B).

Altogether, these results support the contention that high doses of nocodazole are required to rigorously assess the role of Aurora B (Yang et al, 2009). Furthermore, the results provide an initial indication that Aurora B activity is required for the checkpoint response in the absence of microtubules.

Effects on kinetochore localization of checkpoint proteins from inhibiting Aurora B

Lack of kinetochore localization of Mad2 or Mad1 (the Mad2 kinetochore receptor, displaying identical kinetochore localization timing as Mad2) strongly correlates with checkpoint weakening or impairment. Because kinetochore localization of Mad2 is impaired at 0.3 μM nocodazole, but normal at
3.2 μM in the presence of 100 nM hesperadin (Yang et al., 2009), Rieder and colleagues concluded that Mad2 was absent from kinetochores upon inhibition of Aurora B because residual microtubules in low nocodazole were ‘stripping’ Mad2 from kinetochores (Yang et al., 2009), the normal route through which Mad2 is removed from kinetochores (Musacchio and Salmon, 2007).

We found that at 100 nM hesperadin, whether Mad1 is found at kinetochores depends on the protocol of drug exposure. When hesperadin was added after prolonged nocodazole arrest, Mad1 localization at 3.3 μM nocodazole, but not at 0.33 μM, was normal, as reported previously for Mad2 (Yang et al., 2009) (Figure 3A). However, if hesperadin was added together with nocodazole prior to entry into mitosis, Mad1 failed to localize to kinetochores at both low and high-nocodazole concentrations (Figure 3B). Based on these results, we surmise that there is probably a less stringent requirement for Aurora B activity to retain Mad1 and Mad2 at kinetochores than there is for their initial recruitment to kinetochores. 

Outer kinetochore organization is not grossly affected by Aurora B inhibitors

Results so far are consistent with the hypothesis that Aurora B is implicated in checkpoint signalling regardless of its proven function in error correction. Further confirming this idea, hesperadin, like reversine, promoted MCC dissociation.
in a dose-dependent manner (Figure 3C). Mitotic phosphorylation of BubR1 and Bub1 was also dramatically reduced (Figure 3D and E), indicating that both Aurora B and Mps1 contribute to their mitotic phosphorylation.

In the experiments in Figure 3A and B, reduced or absent Mad1 localization in high nocodazole is unlikely to be caused by Mad1 ‘stripping’, as the latter requires microtubules (Hoffman et al., 2001). As an alternative explanation, we asked if the inability of Mad1 to reach the kinetochore was due to a defect in kinetochore assembly when Aurora B is inhibited. Indeed, it has been proposed that Aurora B contributes to outer kinetochore assembly (Emanuele et al., 2008). Other studies, however, confute the idea that Aurora B is important for kinetochore assembly (Liu et al., 2010; Santaguida et al., 2010; Welburn et al., 2010). In agreement with the latter studies, we found that the levels of kinetochore-localized Ndc80 and Knl1, two components of the so-called KMN network that are crucially implicated in the recruitment of the checkpoint proteins, appear to localize to kinetochores essentially normally even at the high concentrations of hesperadin that prevent Mad1 localization in high nocodazole (Supplementary Figure S1). Kinetochore localization of Ndc80 relies on core kinetochore components, including CENP-I and the Mis12 complex (Hori et al., 2003; Kline et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2006; McAinsh et al., 2006). That kinetochore localization of Ndc80 is largely unaffected indicates that the core structure of the kinetochore is preserved in the presence of Aurora B inhibitors. In summary, although we cannot rule out that the localization of additional kinetochore components, not considered in our analysis, is affected when Aurora B is inhibited, we suspect that reduced localization of checkpoint components is unlikely to be caused by an overt defect in the assembly of the kinetochore. Further evidence in support of this contention is discussed in the context of Figure 6.

**What is the ‘right’ concentration of an Aurora B inhibitor?**

Results so far indicate that hesperadin has negative consequences on the checkpoint even when microtubules have been completely depolymerized to exclude effects from inhibiting error correction. Thus, our results challenge the contention that Aurora B influences the checkpoint exclusively through error correction (Yang et al., 2009). We note that this contention was based on the undemonstrated assumption that 100 nM hesperadin is sufficient to completely abrogate Aurora B activity, but our results on the duration of the mitotic arrest at different doses of hesperadin (Supplementary Table S1; Figure 2B) suggest that this might not be the case. This issue is further addressed in experiments presented in Figures 4–6.

On the other hand, using hesperadin (and reversine) at relatively high concentrations, up to 1 μM, raises significant concerns about the specificity of its effects. To address such concerns, we determined that hesperadin is inactive against a set of checkpoint and mitotic kinases (Supplementary Figure S2; the specificity of reversine has been discussed (Santaguida et al., 2010)). Furthermore, in discussing this objection, it should be noted that checkpoint signals from a single unattached kinetochore are sufficient to maintain a mitotic arrest (Rieder et al., 1995), strongly suggesting that the checkpoint network is designed to achieve amplification. The exact topology of the checkpoint network is unknown, so that the way in which signal amplification is achieved remains unclear. But we argue that because of the amplification properties of the network, it may be necessary to achieve very significant inhibition of its activity before a penetrant checkpoint phenotype is observed when chromosomes are unattached. Indeed, small residual amounts (2–5%) of the checkpoint kinase Bub1 are compatible with a checkpoint response in nocodazole, whereas its full depletion causes checkpoint failure (Meraldi and Sorger, 2005; Perera et al., 2007). Similarly, while depletion of the subunits of the Ndc80 complex causes a checkpoint defect, small residual amounts are compatible with strong mitotic arrest in nocodazole (Martin-Lluesma et al., 2002; DeLuca et al., 2003; McCleland et al., 2003; Meraldi et al., 2004).

To provide a quantitative framework to these ideas, we predicted the inhibitory effects of hesperadin or reversine on Aurora B or Mps1 after measuring their catalytic parameters. With 2 mM ATP, a concentration approximating the ATP concentration in cells (Traut, 1994), we predict that 0.18–1.9 μM reversine or 0.13–1.4 μM hesperadin might be respectively required to achieve inhibition of Mps1 or Aurora B activity from 90 to 99% (Figure 3F; Supplementary Figure S3). Factors such as limited inhibitor permeability, inhibitor modification and competition from other active sites, likely further decrease the active inhibitor concentration in cells. Thus, that doses of hesperadin or reversine as high as 1–2 μM are required for checkpoint override is expected and unsurprising.

**Mps1 and Aurora B inhibitors synergize**

To build a stronger case for a direct role of Aurora B in the checkpoint, we asked if such a role could be exacerbated under conditions of partial inhibition of other checkpoint components. For this, we initially tested the effects from combining Aurora B and Mps1 inhibitors on the checkpoint response. At 200 nM, hesperadin or reversine each mildly but significantly affected the timing of the checkpoint response to high nocodazole (Figure 4A; Supplementary Table S1). When the two inhibitors were combined, each at 100 nM, a dramatic checkpoint defect was exposed (Figure 4A). Similar results were obtained in the osteosarcoma U2OS cell line and the non-transformed immortalized epithelial cell line hTERT-RPE1 (Figure 4A). The same effect was also observed at 10 μM nocodazole or 15 μM colchicine, ruling out an off-target effect of the spindle poison on the checkpoint, or an effect of residual microtubules on checkpoint satisfaction (Supplementary Figure S4). The combination of 100 nM hesperadin and 100 nM reversine caused a dramatic decrease in the levels of MCC, indicative of its disassembly and of checkpoint override (Figure 4B).

Hesperadin has relatively modest selectivity for Aurora B (Haul et al., 2003), leaving open the possibility that its effects on the checkpoint are due to inhibition of other Aurora family members, Aurora A and Aurora C. To address this concern, we carried out inhibitor combination experiments with additional Aurora inhibitors, including ZM447439, reported to have 20-fold Aurora B/Aurora A selectivity and five-fold Aurora B/Aurora C selectivity (Ditchfield et al., 2003; Girdler et al., 2006), and AZD1152, reported to have > 1000-fold Aurora B/Aurora A selectivity and > 17-fold Aurora B/Aurora C selectivity (Mortlock et al., 2007). As an alternative Mps1 inhibitor, we used Mps1-IN-1 (Kwiatkowski
et al., 2010). In all cases, we observed very dramatic effects from the combined inhibition of Aurora B and Mps1 (Figure 4C and D).

The localization experiments in Figure 3A and B suggest the possibility that the effects of Aurora B inhibitors on the checkpoint response might depend on whether the Aurora B

Figure 4 Specificity of effects of Aurora B inhibitors on the spindle checkpoint. (A) The indicated human cell lines were released from a single thymidine arrest and treated with nocodazole (3.3 μM) and the indicated inhibitors. Cells were analysed by time-lapse video microscopy. This protocol, illustrated schematically in Figure 2A, was also used for (C, D). Time spent in mitosis was evaluated based on mitotic rounding up of cells. Values represent mean and s.d. and were calculated from at least 50 cells for each condition. (B) Immunoprecipitation of Cdc20 and analysis of interacting proteins at the indicated concentration of reversine, hesperadin or their combination. Cells were treated as indicated. (C, D) The same experiment as in (A) was carried out with different inhibitors or inhibitor combinations in HeLa cells. (E) Asynchronously growing HeLa cells were treated with 3.3 μM nocodazole for 6 h. Mitotic cells were collected by shake-off, re-plated in the presence of the indicated inhibitors and filmed by time-lapse video microscopy. (F) The experiment was conducted as described in (E), but cells were kept in 3.3 μM nocodazole for 12 h before shake-off, re-plating and filming. Under these conditions, cells treated with hesperadin alone did not leave mitosis earlier than control cells. Cells treated with hesperadin and reversine, however, did.
inhibitors are added prior to entry into mitosis or after entry into mitosis. Specifically, these results suggest the possibility that Aurora B is required to initiate the checkpoint response, but not to maintain it. To test this idea, we collected mitotic cells by shake-off 6 h after the addition of nocodazole and added hesperadin, reversine or their combination. The results in Figure 4E demonstrate that under these conditions, inhibitor-treated cells exited mitosis prematurely, indicating that Aurora B is not only required for instating checkpoint signaling, but also for maintaining it. When cells were harvested after a 12-h mitotic arrest, we noted that the ability of Aurora B and Mps1 inhibitors, or their combination, to drive mitotic exit was comparatively reduced, although not abrogated (Figure 4F). It is difficult to explain these observations, but we speculate that they might be related to defined physiological changes in cells facing a prolonged arrest with high concentrations of spindle poisons, and possibly finalized to prevent re-entry in the cell cycle.

**Formal analysis using Loewe’s additivity hypothesis**

The experiments above suggest the possibility that combining Aurora B and Mps1 inhibitors has a more than additive adverse effect on the checkpoint. To explore this systematically, we analysed the effects from combining hesperadin and reversine. Figure 5 demonstrates that combining hesperadin and reversine produces synergy when the two drugs are used in the three different combination ratios (see Supplementary Figure S5). Strong synergy is observed (CI < 0.3) for a large range of fractional inhibition. As an example, in order to produce an effect of about 85%, we should use about 560 nM reversine or 41000 nM hesperadin; but, if we use them in 1:1 combination, about 55 nM reversine + 55 nM hesperadin are sufficient. In this case the CI is about 0.13.
...and reversine at different ratios in high nocodazole (Figure 5A). As little as 10 nM hesperadin reduced the duration of the checkpoint arrest to one third at 100 nM reversine (from 754 to 256 min), whereas 25 nM hesperadin caused dramatic checkpoint failure (Figure 5A; Supplementary Table S1). In isolation, 100 nM reversine or 25 nM hesperadin had negligible effects on the localization of Mad1 or Zwilch to kinetochores in high nocodazole, whereas their combination evicted them from kinetochores (Figure 5B and C) and caused significant MCC disassembly (Figure 5D). Being caused by very low hesperadin concentrations, these dramatic effects are likely due to specific Aurora B inhibition.

We adopted the Loewe additivity hypothesis (Loewe, 1953) and the Chou and Talalay method (Chou and Talalay, 1981, 1984; Chou, 1991) to investigate the effect of hesperadin and reversine combinations on the timing of mitotic exit from 3.3 μM nocodazole-induced arrest. At several relative ratios (three of which are shown in Figure 5E), the effects on the checkpoint from combining the two inhibitors denoted a very small combination index (CI), indicative of very strong synergy between the inhibitors (CI < 1 indicates synergy and CI = 0.3 indicates strong synergy) (Figure 5E; Supplementary Figure S5).

**Synergy between partial outer kinetochore defects and Aurora B inhibition**

We performed additional experiments by exploiting partial or complete depletions of checkpoint proteins through RNAi (Figure 6A). RNAi-based depletion of MPS1 caused complete checkpoint override (Figure 6B), but we found it difficult to modulate the levels of Mps1 with sufficient robustness to achieve partial depletion (not shown). Partial depletion of Aurora B by RNAi (Figure 6B), on the other hand, was compatible with a long-term arrest in high nocodazole, but not when reversine was used at 250 nM. Also in this case there was a very strong synergistic effect (Figure 6B; Supplementary Table S1).

The KMN network complex is implicated in the recruitment of all checkpoint proteins (with the exclusion of Aurora B) (Santaguida and Musacchio, 2009). Within the KMN network, the Ndc80 complex has been implicated in a pathway of recruitment of the RZZ complex, Mad1 and Mad2 (Martin-Lluesma et al., 2002). Consistently, RNAi-based depletion of Ndc80 and NuF2, two components of the Ndc80 complex, results in complete inhibition of the checkpoint response (Meraldi et al., 2004). On the other hand, suboptimal depletions result in a strong mitotic arrest even in the absence of spindle poisons, possibly because a residual checkpoint response is mounted in the presence of residual Ndc80 complex (Martin-Lluesma et al., 2002; DeLuca et al., 2003). We confirmed that partial RNAi-based depletion of NuF2 was compatible with prolonged checkpoint arrest in high nocodazole (Figure 6C). Addition of hesperadin at 100 nM caused a dramatic effect on the duration of the checkpoint response, with cells being completely unable to arrest in mitosis in high nocodazole (Figure 6C).

Thus, even defects in kinetochore assembly can sensitize cells to Aurora B inhibition and cause a checkpoint defect in high nocodazole. These results further argue against the possibility, discussed above, that Aurora B inhibitors can, by themselves, dramatically affect kinetochore assembly.

**Conclusions**

The work presented here lends credit to the hypothesis that Aurora B has a role in the spindle checkpoint independently of error correction. This hypothesis has been formulated several times in the past (Kallio et al., 2002; Ditchfield et al., 2003; Hau et al., 2003; Petersen and Hagan, 2003; King et al., 2007; Vander et al., 2007; Vanoosthuyse and Hardwick, 2009), and regularly challenged on the ground that it is difficult to identify conditions in which the well-established influence on error correction from inhibiting Aurora B can be reliably excluded from the analysis of the role of Aurora B in the checkpoint (for recent discussions, see Khodjakov and Rieder, 2009; Nezi and Musacchio, 2009; Santaguida and Musacchio, 2009; Khodjakov and Pines, 2010; Lampson and Cheeseman, 2010; Maresca and Salmon, 2010).
Our results question the contention that Aurora B is exclusively an extrinsic checkpoint component whose influence on the checkpoint is merely a consequence of its participation in error correction. If error correction and the spindle checkpoint were molecularly distinct, then the inhibition of error correction should only influence the ability to correct improper attachments, but not the checkpoint response, as predicted for the test of model 1 (Figure 1C). We show instead, under conditions in which inhibition of error correction is not expected to have detrimental effects on the intensity of the checkpoint response, due to the presence of very high concentrations of microtubule depolymerizers, that the spindle checkpoint response is very severely impaired when Aurora kinase activity becomes inhibited, as expected for model 2 (Figure 1D).

Several previous studies have suggested the possibility that Aurora kinase activity is completely (Biggins et al., 1999; Yang et al., 2009) or partially (Ditchfield et al., 2003; Hauf et al., 2003) dispensable for the checkpoint response to unattached kinetochores. We suspect that the observations on which these conclusions were based might have been caused by residual kinase activity of mutant proteins or incomplete inhibition with small-molecule inhibitors. For instance, our results strongly argue that 100 nM hesperadin achieves significant but incomplete inhibition of Aurora B activity, in line with the partial inhibition of the spindle checkpoint observed in HeLa cells under these conditions (Hauf et al., 2003).

Previously, partial Aurora B and Bub1 inhibition has been shown to have synergistic effects on checkpoint inhibition (Meraldi and Sorg, 2005; Morrow et al., 2005). The results were interpreted as reflecting the existence of two distinct arms of the checkpoint response, a tension-dependent arm relying on Aurora B and an attachment sensitive arm relying on Bub1. We show that Aurora B and Mps1 strongly synergize in the checkpoint. Because complete inhibition of Aurora B, Bub1 or Mps1 in isolation leads to a checkpoint defect in high nocodazole (with high doses of hesperadin in the case of Aurora B, with high doses of reversine or RNAi in the case of Mps1, with RNAi in the case of Bub1), these kinases appear to operate within a single pathway, and synergy results from inhibiting this pathway concomitantly at distinct nodes. Understanding the topology of the checkpoint network that explains these results is the challenge for future studies.

By showing that Aurora B might contribute to checkpoint signalling independently of error correction, we provide the basis for a better molecular understanding of the checkpoint sensory apparatus. The ability of Aurora B to phosphorylate substrates in the kinetochore depends on their distance from Aurora B, which changes during the course of attachment (Liu et al., 2009). In this respect, Aurora B might contribute to the ability of kinetochores of monitoring intrakinetochore stretch, an increase of ~35 nm in the distance between inner and outer kinetochore components when tension is built (Maresca and Salmon, 2009; Uchida et al., 2009). The exact molecular changes imposed by intrakinetochore stretch, and the way Aurora B might measure them, remain a matter for conjecture (Liu et al., 2009; Maresca and Salmon, 2009, 2010; Santaguida and Musacchio, 2009). We note that the physical distances associated with intrakinetochore stretch, ~35 nm, resemble the molecular scale of the proteins involved (e.g. the Ndc80 complex has a long axis of 55–60 nm). This suggests that the pool of Aurora B responsible for the checkpoint response might reside very closely to its substrates. The very high local concentration of checkpoint-relevant kinase-substrate pairs at unattached kinetochores might explain why very little residual Aurora kinase activity is compatible with the checkpoint response.

Materials and methods

Cell culture and synchronization
HeLa cells and U2OS cells were grown in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle medium (Euroclone) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Hyclone) and 2 mM L-glutamine. hTERT-RPE1 cells were grown in Minimal Essential Medium: HAM’s F12K Medium 1:1 supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Hyclone), 15 mM HEPES, 0.5 mM sodium pyruvate. Nocodazole (at concentrations indicated in each figure or figure legend), thymidine (2 mM) and Colchicine (15 μM) were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich. MG132 (Calbiochem) was used at 10 μM throughout.

RNAi
Previously described siRNA duplexes were used to repress Aurora B (Ditchfield et al., 2003), Mps1 (Jelluma et al., 2008) and Nuf2 (Meraldi et al., 2004). siRNA duplexes were purchased from Dharmacon Research and transfected using Lipofectamine 2000 reagent (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Immunofluorescence microscopy and antibodies for immunofluorescence
Immunofluorescence microscopy was carried out on cells fixed using PFA 4% in PBS, permeabilized using Triton X-100 0.1% in PBS, then treated with BSA 4% in PBS as blocking agent and incubated with the proper antibodies diluted in BSA 4% in PBS. Incubation with primary and secondary antibodies was performed as described previously (Taylor et al., 2001). Antibodies against Mad1, BubR1, Bub1, Cenp-C and Zwilch have been described (Taylor et al., 2001; De Antoni et al., 2005; Trazzi et al., 2009; Civril et al., 2010). Additional antibodies for immunofluorescence were anti-Centromeric antibodies (working dilution 1:50, Antibodies Inc.) and mouse anti-HEC1 (human NDC80) (working dilution 1:1000, Genetex Clone 9G3.23). Cy3- and Cy5-labelled and Alexa-488-labelled secondary antibodies for immunofluorescence were from Jackson Immunoresearch and Invitrogen, respectively. DNA was stained with 4’,6-diamidino-2-phenylindole. The coverslips were mounted using Mowiol mounting media. Cells were imaged using a Leica TCS SP2 confocal microscope equipped with a ×63 NA 1.4 objective lens using the LCS 3D software (Leica). Images were imported in Adobe Photoshop CS3 (Adobe Systems Inc.) and levels were adjusted.

Antibodies for immunoblotting
The following antibodies were used for immunoblotting: rabbit anti-Aurora B (working dilution 1:1000, Abcam); rabbit anti-Bub1 (working dilution 1:2000, Abcam); mouse anti-BubR1 (working dilution 1:1000, Transduction Laboratories, BD); mouse anti-Mps1 (working dilution 1:2000, Upstate); rabbit anti-pH3 Ser10 (working dilution 1:1000, Abcam); rabbit anti-Cdc20 (working dilution 1:500, Santa Cruz); mouse anti-Hec1 (human Ndc80) (working dilution 1:1000, Genetex Clone 9G3.23); mouse anti-Bub3 (working dilution 1:2000, Transduction lab, BD); mouse anti-Mad2 (clone AS55-A12) was produced at the IFOM-IEO campus monoclonal antibody facility (De Antoni et al., 2005).

Immunoprecipitations
HeLa cells were harvested by trypsinization and lysed in lysis buffer (50 mM HEPES pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 1% glycerol, 1% Triton X-100, 5 mM EGTA, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 10 mM Na3VO4, 50 mM NaF, 10 mM Na4-pyrophosphate, protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche)) for 20 min on ice and then sonicated. Cell lysates were centrifuged for 45 min at 13 000 r.p.m. at 4 °C. Equivalent amounts of soluble protein lysates were incubated with mouse anti-Cdc20 (2 μg antibody/mg lysate—Santa Cruz) for 12 h at 4 °C followed by
incubation with protein G Sepharose beads (Pharmacia) at 4°C for 2 h. The beads were washed three times in lysis buffer and proteins were eluted in SDS sample buffer.

**Video microscopy**

Live cell imaging was performed using an IX70 inverted microscope (Olympus) equipped with an incubation chamber (Solent Scientific) maintained at 37°C in an atmosphere of 5% CO₂. Movies were acquired using a ×20 magnification objective controlled by ScanR software (Olympus).

**In vitro kinase assays**

In vitro kinase assays were performed and analysed as previously described (Santaguida et al., 2010).

**ADP luminescent assay**

Kinetic analyses of Aurora B were performed using a luminometric assay involving the concentration of ATP using the ADP-Glo reagents (Promega). In all, 5 nM Aurora B kinase was assayed in a 10-μl reaction containing 25 mM Tris (pH 7.6, 10 mM MgCl₂, 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 1 mM DTT, varying concentrations of ATP and 5 μM histone H3 (Roche) and followed for 15 min. In all, 50 mM Nps1 kinase was assayed in a 10-μl reaction containing 12.5 mM Tris (pH 7.6, 10 mM MgCl₂, 1 mM EGTA, 0.01% Triton X-100, varying concentrations of ATP and 6 μM MADI1:MAD2 complex as substrate and followed for 30 min. The overall reaction rate was determined as the slope of the linearly increasing phase of the reaction. Each data point was collected in duplicate and kinetic parameters were obtained using GraphPad Prism v3.0 software.

**Additivity analysis**

To define fractional inhibition, we considered 70 min spent as a mitotically rounded-up cell as corresponding to a 100% drug effect (maximum duration of mitosis, corresponding to no drug addition). The effect is therefore intended as the percent reduction of time required for mitotic exit. So, if a drug (or a combination of drugs) produces a mitotic exit time equal to x minutes, we say that the effect produced is [(100-70)−(−x)]/(100−70) = (100−(−x))/1030. In order to achieve and Talalay method (Chou and Talalay, 1981, 1984; Chou, 1991), we first fitted dose–effect curves for single inhibitors with Hill functions of the form

\[ E = \frac{E_{\text{max}} \cdot (E / K)}{K + (E / K)} \]

where

- \( E_{\text{max}} \) is the percent effect deriving from a drug concentration equal to 1 of a single drug and \( n \) is the Hill coefficient for single inhibitors.
- \( E_{\text{max}} \) is a constant equal to one.
- \( E \) is the percent effect deriving from a drug concentration equal to \( C \) of a single drug and \( n \) is the Hill coefficient for single inhibitors.

Hence, from this model, we determined the IC₅₀ values for each drug. The IC₅₀ values for each drug were determined using GraphPad Prism v3.0 software.

**Determination of the predicted concentrations of inhibitors in vivo**

To predict the amount of inhibitors required for inhibiting Aurora B and Mps1 in vivo, we assumed a concentration of ATP in cells of 2 mM (Traut, 1994) and cellular concentrations of each kinase of 1 nM. Moreover, we assumed, as done for the measurements in vitro, that the substrates of the enzymes are more abundant than the enzymes (i.e. no free enzymes). We then used the differential-algebraic equations described above to calculate the initial rate of the reaction in the presence of different concentrations of inhibitors, using the kinetic parameters measured in vitro. We used the initial rate of the reaction without inhibitors as 100%, and we identified the concentration of inhibitors that would reduce it to 50, 10, 5 and 1%.

**Supplementary data**

Supplementary data are available at The EMBO Journal Online (http://www.embojournal.org).

**Acknowledgements**

We thank Stephen S Taylor, Tarun Kapoor and the members of the Musacchio laboratory for many helpful discussions, and Nathaniel Gray for providing Mps1-IN-1. Work in the Musacchio laboratory is generously funded by the Association for International Cancer Research (AICR), the Telethon Foundation, the Seventh Framework Program European Research Council grant KINCON and the Integrated Project MitoSys (grant agreement 214548), the Italian Association for Cancer Research (AIRC), the Fondo di Investimento per la Ricerca di Base (FIRB), the Cariplo Foundation and the Human Frontier Science Program. SS is a
graduate student of the European School of Molecular Medicine and is supported by a fellowship from the Italian Foundation for Cancer Research (FIRC).

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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