

# Metal-Free $\sigma$ -Bond Metathesis in Ammonia Activation by a Diazadiphosphapentalene

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**Supporting Information** 

**ABSTRACT:** A diazadiphosphapentalene derivative **5** featuring a bent geometry with two phosphorus atoms at the bridgehead has been synthesized. Under mild conditions, compound **5** readily activated ammonia to afford 1-aza-2,3-diphospholene derivative **6** bearing an enamine group. The reaction is therefore viewed as a formal  $\sigma$ -bond metathesis between an N–H bond of ammonia and an endocyclic P–N bond of **5**. Details of the reaction mechanism for ammonia activation as well as subsequent isomerization were explored by density functional theory calculations.

he development of synthetic methodology using ammonia (NH3) as a source of nitrogen in preparing N-containing derivatives has attracted great attention in synthetic chemistry over the past two decades.<sup>1-3</sup> Even with transition metals that enable the functionalization of N-H bonds of various amines. however, the activation of NH<sub>3</sub> still remains highly challenging due to the enthalpically strong N–H bond ( $104 \pm 2 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ) and the propensity of NH<sub>3</sub> to form Lewis acid-base adducts with electrophilic metals.<sup>4,5</sup> In 2007, Bertrand and Schoeller et al. reported the first example of ammonia splitting under metal-free conditions with (alkyl)(amino)carbenes (AACs) A, where the oxidative addition of N-H bond of ammonia occurred at a carbene center to form B (Figure 1a).<sup>6</sup> Since then, similar reactions employing various main group compounds containing group 13 and 14 elements have been reported.<sup>7–15</sup> Significantly, all these pioneering works relied on the high reactivity of lowvalent p-block elements in their low-oxidation states, and accordingly, most reaction processes involved oxidation of the p-block element center. Very recently, Radosevich and Ess et al. have elegantly demonstrated the N-H cleavage of ammonia and amines with a group 15 derivative C featuring a unique planar structure (Figure 1b).<sup>16,17</sup> The activation sequence therein resulted in oxidation of the P atom from +III (C) to +V (D); thus, the reaction is also regarded as oxidative addition similar to those achieved by other main-group compounds. To establish an effective, direct functionalization of ammonia, the development of various activation pathways and a deep mechanistic understanding of them would be beneficial. Inspired by the work of Radosevich and Ess et al., we decided to target a hitherto unknown diazadiphosphapentalene derivative E (Figure 1c).<sup>18</sup> We reasoned that the presence of two phosphorus atoms at the bridgehead in the ring system would prevent the molecular



**Figure 1.** Splitting of a N–H bond by (a) (alkyl)(amino)carbenes A (Ar = 2,6-diisopropylphenyl) and (b) a planar  $\sigma^3$ -phosphous species C via oxidative addition. (c) NH<sub>3</sub> activation via metal-free  $\sigma$ -bond metathesis.

geometry from being planar as found in **C** and **D**, due to the high energetic barrier to achieve the optimum planar configuration at phosphorus. Consequently, a bent geometry will provide another low-energy means for ammonia activation other than oxidative addition. Herein we report the synthesis, single-crystal X-ray diffraction analysis, computational studies of a diazadiphosphapentalene derivative, and its reactivity involving a unique pathway for ammonia activation.

A cyclic phosphorus monochloride 4 was synthesized via three steps from the reported imine 1 (Scheme 1). Thus, deprotonation of imine 1 with *n*-butyllithium followed by the salt elimination reaction with a half equivalent of phosphorus trichloride (PCl<sub>3</sub>) afforded 2 in 64% yield. After the reduction of the P–Cl bond in 2 by lithium aluminum hydride, which gave the corresponding P–H compound, addition of BH<sub>3</sub> produced 3 in 72% yield. Treatment of 3 with potassium bis(trimethylsilyl)amide (KHMDS) followed by the reaction with an equivalent of phosphorus trichloride in the presence of triethylamine afforded

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a cyclic phosphorus chloride derivative 4 (49%). Compounds 2-4 were fully characterized by nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy and X-ray single crystallography.<sup>19</sup> Next, we attempted deprotonation of 4. Treatment of a toluene solution of 4 with an equivalent of KHMDS led to a light reddish solution. After inorganic salts were filtered off, all volatiles were evaporated under vacuum, which afforded the desired bicyclic compound 5 as a slightly yellowish white solid in 67% yield. Note that 5 is the first example of an isolable diazadiphosphapentalene derivative.<sup>1</sup> In the <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectrum of 5, two characteristic signals appeared at -30.8 ppm (CPC) and 173.2 ppm (NPN). The significant difference of these chemical shifts with respect to those [65.7 ppm (SPS) and 85.1 ppm (CPC)] in a fused benzo-1,2,3-thiadiphosphole derivative  $G^{18c,d}$  probably reflects the larger difference in electronegativity between carbon and nitrogen atoms than that between carbon and sulfur atoms. Consequently, the P–P bond in 5 is likely more polarized than that in **G**, which leads to a smaller  ${}^{1}J_{P-P}$  coupling constant (195.4 Hz) of 5 than that (212.2 Hz) of G. Compound 5 exhibits a larger  ${}^{2}J_{P-H}$  coupling constant (40.6 Hz) than that ( ${}^{2}J_{P-H}$  = 12.0 Hz) of trivinylphosphine.<sup>20</sup> Compound **5** is thermally stable both in the solid state and in solution at ambient temperature, but it decomposes upon exposure to air.

Single crystals of **5** were obtained from a saturated hexane solution at 14 °C, and X-ray diffraction analysis revealed the solid-state molecular structure (Figure 2).<sup>19</sup> In marked contrast



Figure 2. Solid-state structure of 5 (hydrogen atoms are omitted for clarity). Thermal ellipsoids are set at the 30% probability.

to the flat structure of  $C_1^{17}$  5 displays a pronouncedly bent geometry (the sum of angles: P1= 295.99° and P2 = 284.30°), indicating sp<sup>3</sup>-hybridization of the P atoms. Thus, there are eight electrons around each phosphorus atom, which is different from the electronic situation of  $C_1^{17}$  Two P<sub>2</sub>NC<sub>2</sub> five-membered rings share a P–P bond, and all five atoms in each five-membered ring are nearly coplanar (the sum of internal pentagon angles = 536.08° and 533.45°). The P<sub>1</sub>–P<sub>2</sub> distance of 2.2099(9) Å, which is in the range reported of typical P–P single bond,<sup>21</sup> is nearly identical to that (2.2145(8) Å) in 4 (see the Supporting Information). The P–C bonds [P2–C1 1.783(2) Å and P2–C19 1.807(2) Å] as well as the N–P bonds [N1–P1 1.776(2) Å and N2–P1 1.737(2) Å] fall in the ranges of those typical single bonds, respectively.<sup>22</sup> These structural parameters indicate that there is no conjugative delocalization of electrons on the five-membered rings.

To gain further insight into the electronic property, we performed a density functional theory (DFT) calculation on 5.<sup>21</sup> The HOMO is a lone-pair orbital on the P atom between two N atoms, which exhibits conjugation with one of the C=C  $\pi$ -orbitals and lone-pair orbitals of the N atoms (Figure 3, left), whereas the LUMO is distributed significantly on the P atoms, with some contribution from the  $\pi$  orbitals of the aryl substituents on the N atoms (Figure 3, right).



**Figure 3.** Plots of the HOMO (left) and LUMO (right) of **5** calculated at the B3LYP/B1 level of theory (all H atoms are omitted for clarity);  $\Delta E_{(\text{HOMO-LUMO})} = 4.618 \text{ eV}.$ 

Next, we investigated the reaction of 5 with ammonia. At ambient temperature, gaseous ammonia was introduced into the degassed test tube containing a THF solution of 5 (Scheme 2). The reaction mixture was stirred overnight, which gave a colorless solution. The <sup>31</sup>P NMR spectrum of a crude product showed a clean generation of a new compound, and a new set of signals was observed at -40.1 and 108.9 ppm, which significantly shifted upfield with respect to that of 5 but downfield-shifted compared to the chemical shift ( $\delta = 58.9$  ppm) for the corresponding P atom in the related -[N-P-P-C=C]azadiphospholene derivative **H**.<sup>23</sup> The  ${}^{1}J_{P-P}$  coupling constant (253.4 Hz) is greater than those of 5 (195.4 Hz) and H (229.5 Hz), and the  ${}^{2}J_{P-H}$  coupling constant (22.2 Hz) is in the range of typical values for the germinal P-C-H coupling constant  $({}^{2}J_{P-H})$ =  $\sim$ 25 Hz).<sup>24</sup> In the <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectrum, two peaks at 5.30 and 4.63 ppm were detected for CH protons, and a peak for NH was observed at 4.95 ppm, which is in line with the formation of a 1aza-2,3-diphospholene derivative 6. Compound 6 was purified by washing with hexane, and the single crystals were obtained by recrystallization from a solvent mixture of THF and hexane. An X-ray diffraction study confirmed the presence of a NH<sub>2</sub> group on one P atom and an enamine group on the other P atom in the  $P_2NC_2$  five-membered ring, indicating that the formation of an exocyclic P-N bond and an N-H bond of enamine is concomitant with the cleavage of a N–H bond of ammonia.  $^{\rm 19}$ Thus, the activation process can be viewed as a formal  $\sigma$ -bond metathesis between an N-H bond of ammonia and an endocyclic P-N bond of  $5^{.14a,25}$  Not surprisingly, compound 6gradually tautomerizes in a THF solution even at ambient temperature, and after 16 h a formation of an imine derivative 7 was observed (81%, crude yield) (Scheme 2). Moreover, we observed further slow isomerization via an inversion of the P lone

Scheme 2. Reaction of 5 with  $NH_3$  Followed by Isomerizations to 8 via 6 and 7, and Molecular Structures of 6–8 (Ar = 2,6-Diisopropylphenyl; Hydrogen Atoms except for Those on N Atoms Are Omitted for Clarity)



**Figure 4.** DFT-calculated free energy profile (kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>) for the proposed mechanism of NH<sub>3</sub> activation by **5**, and further isomerizations to **8** via

pair of 7, and compound 8 was obtained (46% yield) after 3 days at room temperature (Scheme 2). Compounds 7 and 8 were fully characterized by NMR spectroscopy and X-ray crystallography.<sup>1</sup> To gain insight into the reaction mechanism, we carried out kinetic experiments for the ammonia activation. A THF solution of compound 5 and various concentrations of ammonia (0.08– 0.40 M) in a sealed NMR tube was heated at 40 °C, and the reaction was monitored by <sup>31</sup>P NMR every 9 min. The pseudo first-order rate constants  $k_{obs}$  simulated from the kinetic conversion chart exhibited the best linear correlation with  $[NH_3]^1$  rather than  $[NH_3]^2$  and  $[NH_3]^3$ ; thus, the rate law can be represented by  $k_{obs} = k' [\mathbf{5}]^1 [NH_3]^1$  (see the Supporting Information). This result indicated that the process for the ammonia activation by 5 involved only one NH<sub>3</sub> molecule, which is in stark contrast to Radosevich and Ess's mechanism where three amines were involved in the process of an N-H oxidative addition at the planar  $\sigma^3$ -P atom.<sup>16</sup>

compounds 6 and 7. The blue-colored labels in parentheses indicate the nomenclature in Scheme 2

The pathway for the reaction from **5** and ammonia all the way to **8** was explored theoretically by DFT calculations using the B3LYP functional. Using the dispersion-corrected free-energy values, a reaction energy diagram was drawn (see Figure 4). According to our extensive DFT study, the reaction begins with the cleavage of one of the two P-N bonds of 5, leading to Int2 displaying a nearly planar geometry and a zwitter ionic character,<sup>26</sup> which can be contrasted to the planar but nonionic character of C. Subsequently, NH<sub>3</sub> is activated through transition state TS2 to form Int3. After a minor rotation about a single bond via TS3, Int4 is generated. A comparison between X-ray and DFT structures showed that compound 6 corresponds to Int4. To form 7, the proton on the nitrogen atom should migrate to a carbon atom, which is possible via TS4, once Int4 is converted back to Int3. This proton migration is mediated by the central P–NH<sub>2</sub> moiety. After several minor structural changes, Int7 is generated, which corresponds to 7. Finally, a cis-trans isomerization occurs through pyramidal inversion at the phosphorus between two carbon atoms, to yield the final product 8. The cis-trans isomerization has a very high barrier  $(32.6 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1})$ , consistent with the fact that the conversion of 7 to 8 took 3 days (Scheme 2). The computationally estimated activation parameters for the initial step of ammonia activation were  $\Delta H^{\ddagger} = 19.5 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ,  $\Delta G^{\ddagger}_{(298)} = 28.2 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ , and  $\Delta S^{\ddagger}$ = -29.2 e.u., while the experimental values were  $\Delta H^{\ddagger}$  = 13.8 ±

0.9 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>,  $\Delta G^{\ddagger}_{(298)} = 22.8 \pm 1.8$  kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, and  $\Delta S^{\ddagger} = -30.3 \pm 3.1$  e.u. (see the Supporting Information). Hence, reasonable agreement was obtained between theory and experiment.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated a metal-free ammonia activation under ambient conditions by utilizing a diazadiphosphapentalene derivative **5** that displays a butterfly geometry. As exocyclic P–N bonds of aza-phosphanes are reactive,<sup>27</sup> transfer of the NH<sub>2</sub> fragment from compounds **6–8** to other substrates would be plausible. Thus, this work paves the way for the development of metal-free ammonia activation-transfer reagents.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

#### **S** Supporting Information

Synthesis, NMR spectra, and crystallographic data (CIF) of 2-8; kinetic studies of 5 with NH<sub>3</sub>; and computational details including Cartesian coordinates for stationary points. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs. acs.org.

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#### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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