

# Heterolytic Cleavage of Hydrogen by an Iron Hydrogenase Model: An Fe-H...H-N Dihydrogen Bond Characterized by Neutron Diffraction\*\*

Tianbiao Liu,\* Xiaoping Wang, Christina Hoffmann, Daniel L. DuBois, and R. Morris Bullock\*

**Abstract:** Hydrogenase enzymes in nature use hydrogen as a fuel, but the heterolytic cleavage of H–H bonds cannot be readily observed in enzymes. Here we show that an iron complex with pendant amines in the diphosphine ligand cleaves hydrogen heterolytically. The product has a strong Fe-H...H-N dihydrogen bond. The structure was determined by single-crystal neutron diffraction, and has a remarkably short H...H distance of 1.489(10) Å between the protic N-H<sup>δ+</sup> and hydridic Fe-H<sup>δ-</sup> part. The structural data for [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>4</sub>N</sup>FeH(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>H)]<sup>+</sup> provide a glimpse of how the H–H bond is oxidized or generated in hydrogenase enzymes. These results now provide a full picture for the first time, illustrating structures and reactivity of the dihydrogen complex and the product of the heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> in a functional model of the active site of the [FeFe] hydrogenase enzyme.

Use of hydrogen as a fuel by hydrogenase enzymes<sup>[1]</sup> in nature requires heterolytic cleavage of the H–H bond into a proton (H<sup>+</sup>) and a hydride (H<sup>-</sup>), a reaction that is also a critical step in homogeneous catalysts for the hydrogenation of C=O and C=N bonds.<sup>[2]</sup> Iron, which is earth-abundant and inexpensive,<sup>[3]</sup> is essential in the active site of both the [FeFe] hydrogenase and the [NiFe] hydrogenase, spurring intense efforts to model their reactivity with synthetic iron complexes.<sup>[4]</sup> An understanding of the catalytic oxidation of H<sub>2</sub> by hydrogenases provides insights into the design of synthetic catalysts that are sought as cost-effective alternatives to the

use of the precious metal platinum in fuel cells.<sup>[4b,5]</sup> Crystallographic studies on the [FeFe] hydrogenase enzyme<sup>[6]</sup> were critical to understand its reactivity, but the key H–H bond cleavage step is not readily observed experimentally in natural hydrogenases. Limitations on the precise location of hydrogen atoms by X-ray diffraction can be overcome by use of neutron diffraction,<sup>[7]</sup> though its use is often limited by the difficulty of obtaining suitable crystals and by the scarcity of neutron sources. We herein report that an iron complex with a pendant amine in the diphosphine ligand cleaves hydrogen heterolytically under mild conditions, leading to [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>4</sub>N</sup>FeH(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>H)]<sup>+</sup>BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> (Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>4</sub>N</sup> = tetrafluoropyridylcyclopentadienide; P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub> = 1,5-di(*tert*-butyl)-3,7-di(*tert*-butyl)-1,5-diaza-3,7-diphosphacyclooctane; Ar<sup>F</sup> = 3,5-bis(trifluoromethyl)phenyl; Scheme 1). The Fe-H...H-N moiety has a strong dihydrogen bond,<sup>[8]</sup> with a remarkably short H...H distance of 1.489(10) Å between the protic N-H<sup>δ+</sup> and hydridic Fe-H<sup>δ-</sup> part. The structural data for [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>4</sub>N</sup>FeH(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>H)]<sup>+</sup> provide a glimpse of how the H–H bond is oxidized or generated in hydrogenase enzymes,<sup>[9]</sup> with the pendant amine playing a key role as a proton relay.

We previously reported that H<sub>2</sub>/D<sub>2</sub> scrambling is catalyzed by [CpFe(P<sup>Ph</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H<sub>2</sub>)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> (Bn = benzyl), which mimics hydrogenase activity and implicates heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> (and D<sub>2</sub>) by [CpFe(P<sup>Ph</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>.<sup>[10]</sup> On the basis of single-crystal X-ray diffraction and solution NMR spectroscopic measurements, the H–H distance of the bound H<sub>2</sub> ligand of [CpFe(P<sup>Ph</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> was found to be 0.94 Å. Modifying the ligands by adding an electron-withdrawing C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub> group to the Cp ligand and changing from benzyl to *tert*-butyl groups on the phosphines led to [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>H)]<sup>+</sup>, which is an electrocatalyst for the oxidation of H<sub>2</sub>.<sup>[11]</sup>

The iron complex [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>4</sub>N</sup>Fe(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>)Cl] (**[1-Cl]**, Figure 1) was synthesized and fully characterized by <sup>1</sup>H, <sup>31</sup>P, and <sup>19</sup>F NMR spectroscopy. Addition of NaBAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> readily produces [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>4</sub>N</sup>Fe(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> (**[1]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>**) with a Lewis acidic Fe center and basic pendant amines in the diphosphine ligand. While this complex is drawn as having a vacant coordination site, the pendant amine may be weakly bound to the Fe, as found for a Mn complex<sup>[12]</sup> and a Cr complex<sup>[13]</sup> with a P<sub>2</sub>N<sub>2</sub> ligand. Further studies to evaluate the bonding of **[1]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>** will be reported.

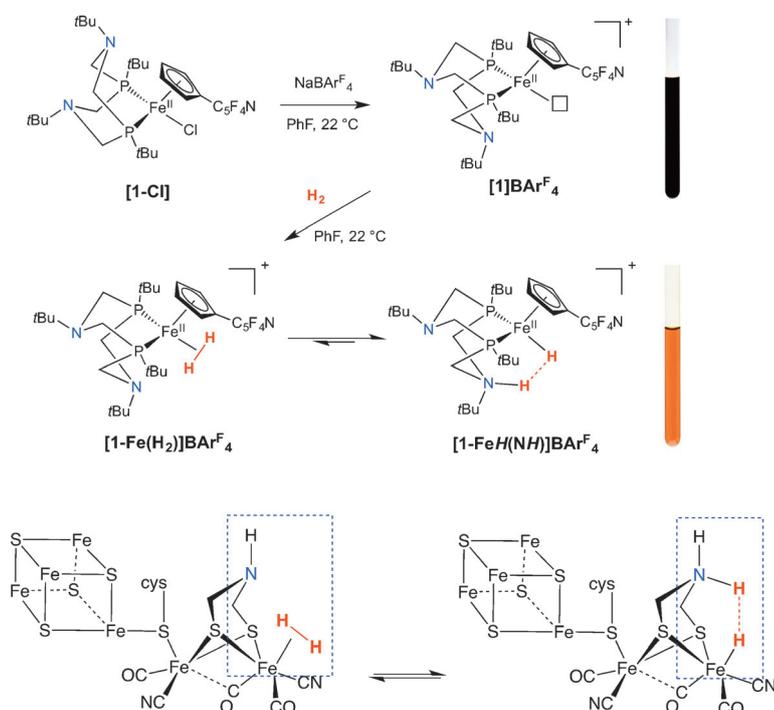
Exposure of a dark brown solution of **[1]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>** to H<sub>2</sub> (1 atm) immediately generates an orange solution (Scheme 1) of **[1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>**, that has a distinctly different color from the typical yellow color of similar [Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> complexes.<sup>[10]</sup> The formation of **[1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>** presumably proceeds through an unobserved [Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> intermediate (**[1-Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup>**) generated by the uptake of H<sub>2</sub> by **[1]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>**

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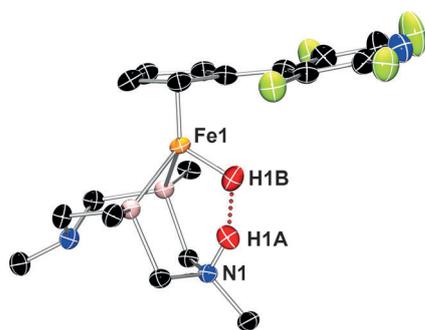
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**Scheme 1.** Top: Synthesis of the 16-electron unsaturated Fe complex (open square indicates a vacant coordination site) and its reaction with H<sub>2</sub>, leading to the heterolytic cleavage product. Photographs at the right side show NMR tubes containing [1]<sup>+</sup> and [1-FeH(NH)]<sup>+</sup>. Bottom: Analogous binding of H<sub>2</sub> and heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> by the [FeFe] hydrogenase.



**Figure 1.** Molecular structure of [1-FeH(NH)]BARF<sub>4</sub> determined by neutron diffraction, showing thermal ellipsoids at 50% probability. For clarity, the methyl substituents of the P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub> ligand, the BARF<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> anion, the co-crystallized fluorobenzene molecule, and hydrogen atoms bonded to carbon atoms are omitted. Selected distances (Å) and angles (°) for [1-FeH(NH)]<sup>+</sup>: H1A...H1B 1.489(10); Fe1–H1B 1.544(7); N1–H1A 1.079(6); H1B–H1A–N1 155.6(8); P1–Fe1–P2 83.62(11).

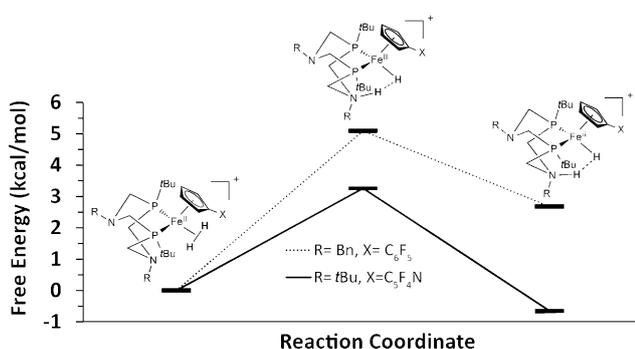
(Scheme 1). The structure of [1-FeH(NH)]BARF<sub>4</sub> was determined by single-crystal neutron diffraction, and shows that heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> occurred, with the hydride transferred to the iron core and the proton located on the pendant amine (Figure 1).<sup>[14]</sup> The Fe–H distance is 1.544(7) Å, and the N–H distance is 1.097(10) Å. The H...H bond distance of 1.489(10) Å is significantly longer than the H–H distance (0.94 Å) of [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H<sub>2</sub>)]BARF<sub>4</sub>.<sup>[11]</sup> Although the

covalent H–H bond was cleaved, the remarkably short H...H separation reveals a strong dihydrogen bond<sup>[8]</sup> between the protic NH<sup>δ+</sup> and the hydridic FeH<sup>δ-</sup>.

Non-bonding H...H distances are typically greater than 2.4 Å, which is twice the van der Waals radius for H, though shorter distances have been found in some molecules with unusual geometries.<sup>[15]</sup> The H...H separation observed in [1-FeH(NH)]BARF<sub>4</sub> is the shortest found for any H...H distance that is not covalently bound, to the best of our knowledge. Several iridium complexes with dihydrogen bonds (Ir–H...H–N) have been reported by Crabtree and co-workers<sup>[16]</sup> and by Morris and co-workers,<sup>[17]</sup> with the H...H separations estimated around 1.75–1.9 Å on the basis of X-ray diffraction and/or NMR spectroscopic measurements. An unusual intermolecular dihydrogen bond was characterized by neutron diffraction: the adduct formed between indole and [ReH<sub>5</sub>(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>] exhibited an H...H separation of 1.734(8) Å.<sup>[18]</sup>

If the structure of [1-FeH(NH)]<sup>+</sup> in solution were the same as that established in the solid state by neutron diffraction, then a resonance for Fe–H would be expected in the <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectrum with a chemical shift similar to the resonance at –16.0 ppm for [CpFe(P<sup>Ph</sup><sub>2</sub>N<sup>tBu</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H)].<sup>[10]</sup> Instead, a broad singlet integrating to two protons was observed at –5.30 ppm in CD<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> at 22 °C and remained unchanged at –80 °C. A <sup>15</sup>N–<sup>1</sup>H heteronuclear single-quantum coherence (HSQC) spectrum of [1-FeH(NH)]BARF<sub>4</sub> in CD<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> at –70 °C exhibits a cross peak between the resonance of the pendant amine nitrogen atom (–293 ppm in the <sup>15</sup>N NMR spectrum) and the resonance at –5.36 ppm (Figure S3). These and other NMR spectroscopy experiments, including deuterium (<sup>2</sup>H) labeling, are consistent with rapid intramolecular hydride–proton exchange of the FeH and NH resonances. This dynamic behavior indicates extremely fast, reversible heterolytic formation and cleavage of the H–H bond through the intermediate [1-Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup>, where the H–H bond is regenerated. Dynamic NMR studies lead to an estimated lower limit of the exchange rate of 2.2 × 10<sup>4</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> at –80 °C, corresponding to a rate of approximately 2.2 × 10<sup>7</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> at 22 °C (see the Supporting Information for details). A similar reversible heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> was recently observed in a MnH/NH complex that also has pendant amines in the diphosphine ligand.<sup>[12]</sup>

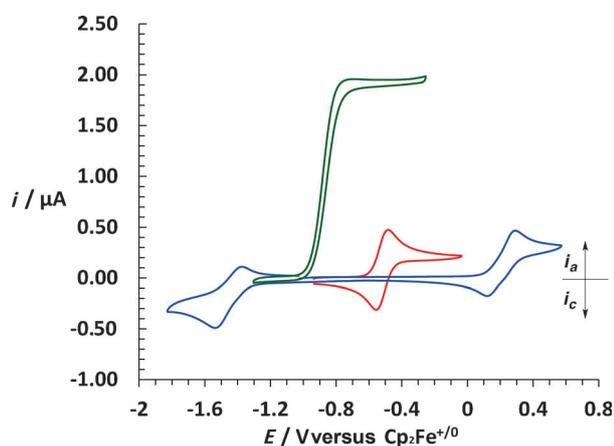
DFT calculations show that [1-FeH(NH)]<sup>+</sup> is approximately 0.65 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> more stable than [1-Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> (Figure 2). The transition state for the heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> was located, giving a reaction barrier of ΔG<sup>‡</sup> = 3.29 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, which is consistent with the estimated maximum value (< 7.3 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>, see the Supporting Information) from the NMR experiments. The low calculated barrier suggests that the rate of reversible heterolytic cleavage may be much higher than the estimated lower limit from the NMR experiments. The H–H distance calculated for [1-Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> is 0.87 Å; it elongates to 0.95 Å in the transition state, and is



**Figure 2.** Computed lowest free energy pathway of H<sub>2</sub> cleavage by [1-Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> (solid line) and [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> (dotted line).

calculated as 1.37 Å in [1-FeH(NH)]<sup>+</sup>. A natural bonding orbital (NBO) analysis gives a Wiberg bond index of 0.1 between the hydride and the proton, suggesting a substantial dihydrogen bonding interaction. The calculated energy of [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> is 2.63 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> more stable than the FeH<sub>2</sub> tautomer [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>H)(H)] (Figure 2), with an activation barrier of 5.09 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> for the H–H bond cleavage [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup>. The calculated barrier is consistent with our experimental observation of the [Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> tautomer.<sup>[10]</sup> Our experimental and computational studies clearly show that carefully controlled changes in the electronic properties of the ligand shifts the thermodynamics of these Fe complexes to favor either H–H retention or heterolytic cleavage.

[1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> is an electrocatalyst for oxidation of H<sub>2</sub>, so it serves as a functional model for the catalytic activity of [FeFe] hydrogenase enzymes. The cyclic voltammogram of [1-Cl] exhibits a reversible one-electron oxidation wave corresponding to the Fe<sup>III</sup>/Fe<sup>II</sup> couple at –0.54 V versus the



**Figure 3.** Cyclic voltammograms that indicate catalytic oxidation of H<sub>2</sub> (1.0 atm) using [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> (1.0 mM) in the presence of *N*-methylpyrrolidine (60 mM). The red trace is a cyclic voltammogram of [1-Cl] (1.0 mM). The blue trace is a cyclic voltammogram of [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> (1.0 mM) generated in situ from [1-Cl] by adding 1.0 equiv NaBAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> under 1.0 atm H<sub>2</sub>. The green trace is a cyclic voltammogram recorded after adding 60 equiv *N*-methylpyrrolidine (60 mM). Conditions: scan rate 20 mVs<sup>-1</sup>, PhF as solvent, 0.1 M *n*Bu<sub>4</sub>NB(C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub>)<sub>4</sub> as supporting electrolyte; glassy carbon working electrode. Potentials are referenced to Cp<sub>2</sub>Fe<sup>+/0</sup>.

Cp<sub>2</sub>Fe<sup>+/0</sup> couple (Figure 3, red trace). [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> exhibits quasi-reversible redox waves at 0.29 V (Fe<sup>III/II</sup> couple) and –1.53 V (Fe<sup>II/I</sup> couple; Figure 3, blue trace). The addition of an excess amount of base (*N*-methylpyrrolidine) to a solution of [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> led to the catalytic oxidation of H<sub>2</sub>, as indicated by the plateau shape observed at a half-wave potential of –0.86 V (Figure 3, green trace). The turnover frequency for the oxidation of H<sub>2</sub> was determined to be 0.9 s<sup>-1</sup>. The overpotential at the half-wave potential was determined to be 95 mV (see the Supporting Information for the determination of the rate constant and overpotential). The proposed mechanism is analogous to that proposed for [Cp<sup>C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>Bn</sup><sub>2</sub>)H].<sup>[11]</sup>

These results provide a full picture of the structures and reactivity of the [Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)]<sup>+</sup> complex and the product of the heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub> in a functional model of the active site of the [FeFe] hydrogenase enzyme. DFT calculations by Fan and Hall on a structural model of the [FeFe] hydrogenase provided theoretical evidence for a [Fe(H<sub>2</sub>)] species and subsequent intramolecular H–H bond cleavage.<sup>[19]</sup> The resultant Fe–H⋯H–N species had a dihydrogen bond with a computed H⋯H distance of 1.472 Å, which is nearly identical to the H⋯H distance we found in [1-FeH(NH)]<sup>+</sup>. However, the Fe(H<sub>2</sub>) and Fe–H⋯H–N states of the active site of hydrogenase have never been experimentally observed. Rauchfuss and co-workers recently reported<sup>[20]</sup> a structural study of a model of the [FeFe] hydrogenase active site ((H)Fe<sub>2</sub>(S<sub>2</sub>NH)(CO)<sub>2</sub>(dppv)<sub>2</sub>)<sup>2+</sup>, where S<sub>2</sub>NH is the protonated azadithiolate ligand [(SCH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>2</sub>NH<sub>2</sub>]<sup>-</sup> and dppv is *cis*-C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>(PPh<sub>2</sub>)<sub>2</sub> featuring a dihydrogen bond between a terminal iron hydride and the NH proton. In that complex, the H⋯H distance was determined by X-ray diffraction as 1.88(7) Å. The dihydrogen bond of [(H)Fe<sub>2</sub>(S<sub>2</sub>NH)(CO)<sub>2</sub>(dppv)<sub>2</sub>]<sup>2+</sup> was formed by protonation of the azadithiolate ligand of the precursor, [(H)Fe<sub>2</sub>(S<sub>2</sub>N)(CO)<sub>2</sub>(dppv)<sub>2</sub>]<sup>+</sup>, rather than by heterolytic cleavage of H<sub>2</sub>; observation of the corresponding dihydrogen complex [(H<sub>2</sub>)Fe<sub>2</sub>(S<sub>2</sub>N)(CO)<sub>2</sub>(dppv)<sub>2</sub>]<sup>2+</sup> has not been reported.

Our results provide experimental support for the previously proposed binding of H<sub>2</sub> to the distal Fe in the ferrous oxidation state (dashed blue rectangle in Scheme 1) of the [FeFe] hydrogenase enzyme and the participation of a pendant amine in the heterolytic cleavage of the bound dihydrogen molecule. The product of heterolytic cleavage has a strong Fe–H⋯H–N dihydrogen bond.

### Experimental Section

The synthesis of NaCp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>N, P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub> [Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>)Cl<sub>2</sub>], [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>)Cl], and [Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>, experimental details of single-crystal X-ray diffraction and electrochemical H<sub>2</sub> oxidation, and DFT calculations are given in the Supporting Information.

[Cp<sup>C<sub>3</sub>F<sub>5</sub></sup>Fe(P<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>N<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>H)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>, [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>: [1-Cl] (0.135 g, 0.200 mmol) and NaBAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> (0.190 g, 0.210 mmol) were dissolved in fluorobenzene (5 mL). Then H<sub>2</sub> gas (1.0 atm) was purged through the solution, resulting in a rapid color change from dark to orange, indicating the formation of [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub>, which was confirmed by <sup>1</sup>H NMR and <sup>31</sup>P[<sup>1</sup>H] NMR spectroscopy. After filtration to remove insoluble solids, [1-FeH(NH)]BAR<sup>F</sup><sub>4</sub> was precipitated by adding pentane (60 mL) to the filtrate. The resulting



## Communications

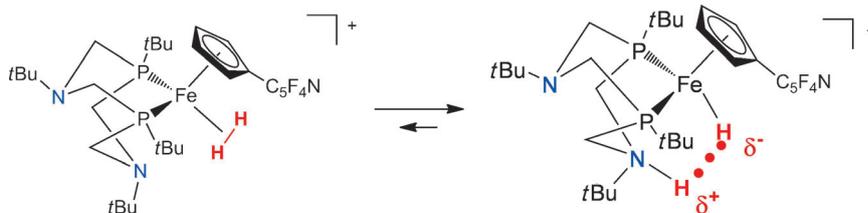
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### Heterolytic $H_2$ Cleavage



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R. M. Bullock\* ————— ■■■■-■■■■

Heterolytic Cleavage of Hydrogen by an  
Iron Hydrogenase Model: An Fe-H...H-N  
Dihydrogen Bond Characterized by  
Neutron Diffraction



**Caught in the act:** The addition of  $H_2$  to a synthetic iron complex containing a pendant amine (a model complex for [FeFe] hydrogenase) leads to facile heterolytic cleavage of  $H_2$ . Neutron dif-

fraction indicates a very short H...H bond distance of 1.489(10) Å in the Fe-H...H-N complex, thus providing a glimpse of how the H-H bond is oxidized in hydrogenase enzymes.