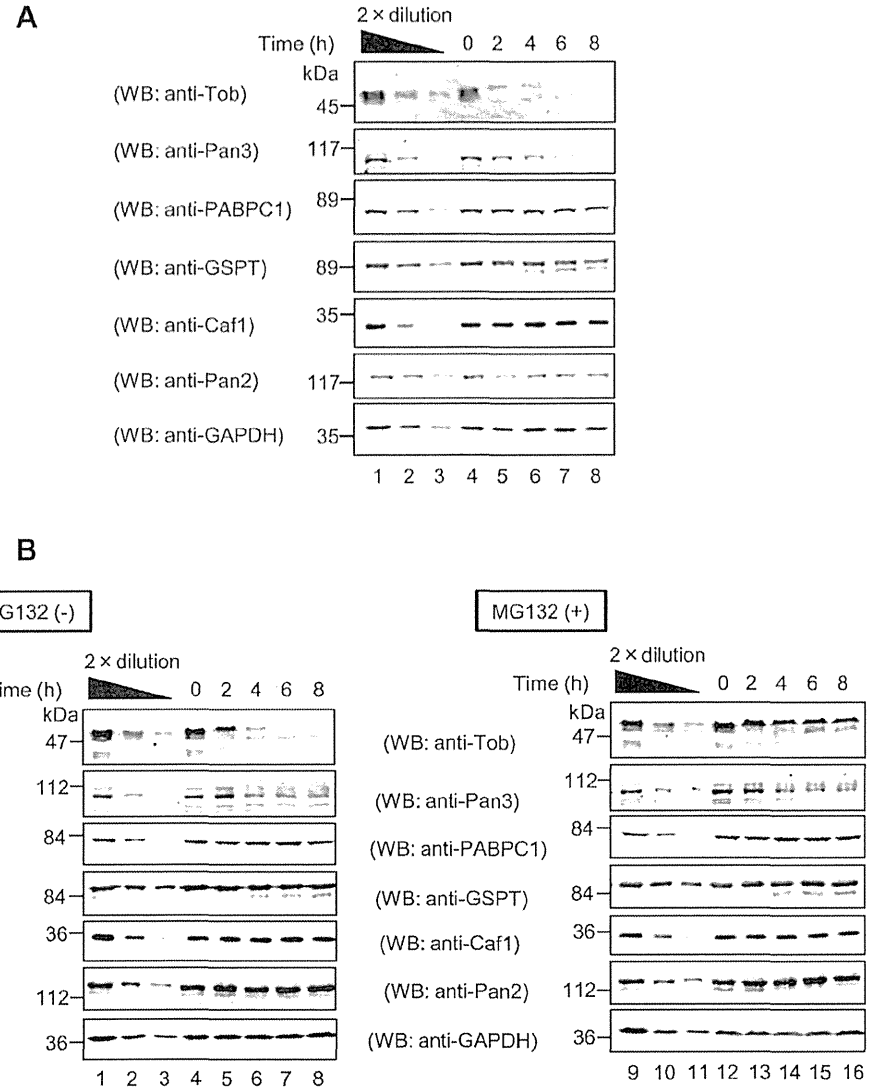

Fig. 2. Tob and Pan3 are selectively degraded during arsenite-induced oxidative stress. (A) T-REx-HeLa cells were harvested at a specified time after the addition of arsenite, and proteins were analyzed by Western blotting with the indicated antibodies. The three leftmost lanes, which analyzed two-fold dilutions of cellular protein, show that the conditions used for Western blotting were semi-quantitative. (B) As in (A), except that MG132 was added to cells 30 min prior to the addition of arsenite.

5 × Flag-EGFP mRNA as a transfection/loading control, and either Tob1/Tob2 siRNA, Pan3 siRNA, or control siRNA, and deadenylation kinetics were monitored as above. The knockdown of Tob inhibited the deadenylation of β-globin mRNA, the kinetics of which were similar to those during arsenite stress (Fig. 3A–C). On the other hand, the knockdown of Pan3 specifically inhibited the early phase of deadenylation (Fig. 3B), the kinetics of which were slightly different from those during arsenite stress. The expression of Tob and Pan3 was confirmed by Western blotting with the indicated antibodies (Fig. 3D). These results suggest that the stress-induced inhibition of β-globin mRNA deadenylation is mainly caused by the degradation of Tob, and only partially by that of Pan3.

Next, we investigated the deadenylation kinetics of unstable c-myc mRNA. To identify the deadenylases responsible for c-myc mRNA deadenylation, the effects of the overexpression of nuclease-deficient Caf1 (Caf1 D161A) and Pan2 (Pan2 D1083A) on c-myc mRNA deadenylation were analyzed. T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with a plasmid expressing c-myc mRNA, a reference plasmid expressing 5 × Flag-GST-CAT, and either pCMV-5 × Myc-Pan2 D1083A, pCMV-5 × Myc-Caf1 D161A or, as a control, pCMV-5 × Myc, and deadenylation kinetics were analyzed. The overexpression of Caf1 D161A almost completely repressed the rate of deadenylation of c-myc mRNA (Supplementary Figure lanes 11–15), whereas Pan2 D1083A had no significant effect on the rate of deadenylation (Supplementary Figure lanes 6–10). These results demonstrate that the Caf1–Ccr4–Tob complex, but not the Pan2–Pan3 complex, is responsible for c-myc mRNA deadenylation. Therefore, we hypothesized that arsenite inhibits the deadenylation of c-myc mRNA through degradation of Tob and, thus analyzed the effects of the knockdown of Tob on c-myc mRNA deadenylation. T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with a plasmid expressing c-myc mRNA, a reference plasmid expressing 5 × Flag-GST-CAT, and either Tob1/Tob2 siRNA or control siRNA, and deadenylation was monitored as above. As shown in Fig. 3D–F, the knockdown of Tob repressed c-myc mRNA deadenylation, the kinetics of which were similar to those during arsenite stress. These results suggest that the stress-induced inhibition of c-myc mRNA deadenylation is caused by the degradation of Tob. Thus,

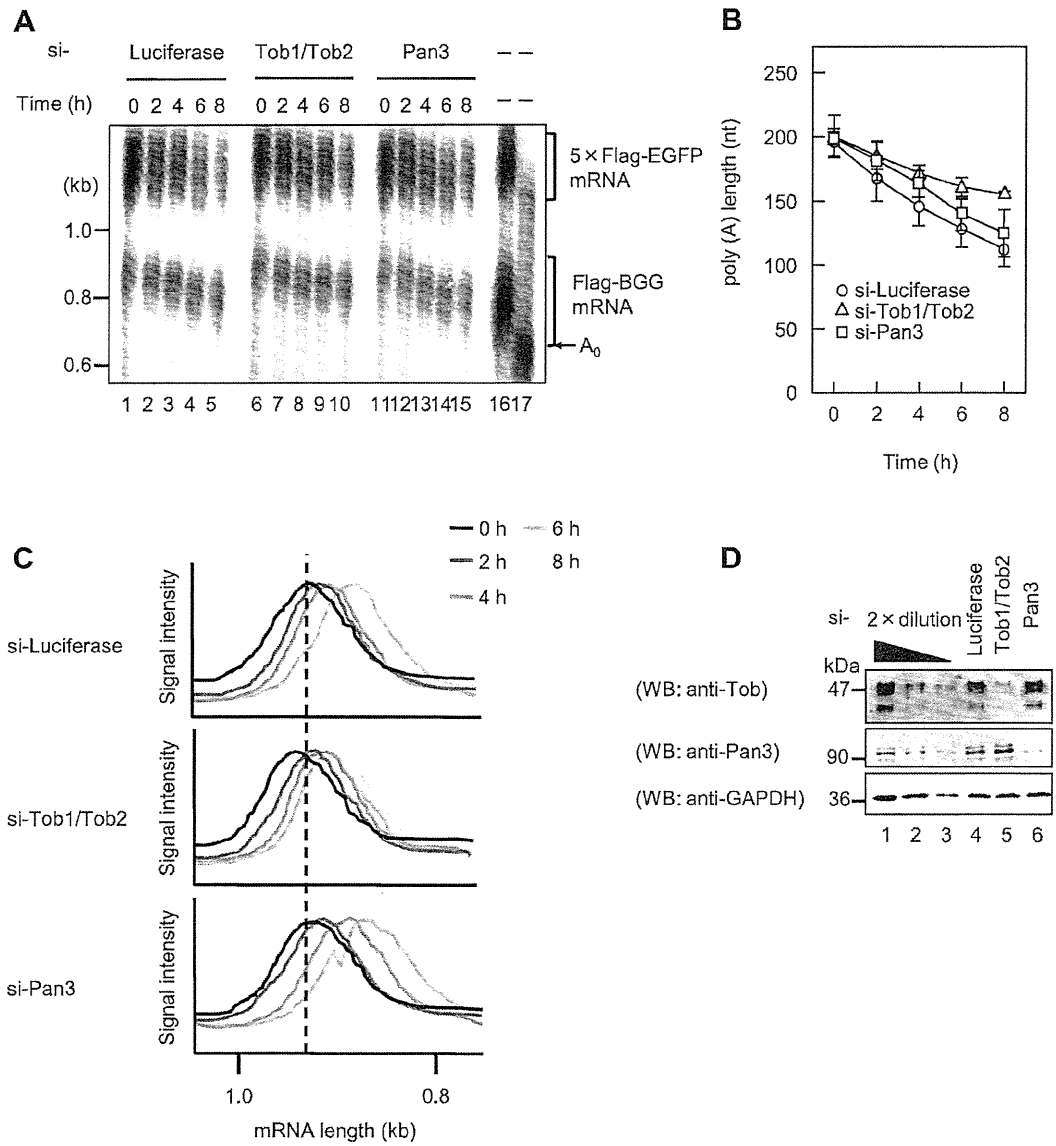

Fig. 3. siRNA-mediated downregulation of either Tob1/Tob2 or Pan3 recapitulates the inhibition of mRNA deadenylation during arsenite-induced oxidative stress. (A) T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with a pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG reporter plasmid, pCMV-5 × Flag-EGFP reference plasmid, and either Luciferase siRNA (lanes 1–5), Tob1/Tob2 siRNAs (lanes 6–10), or Pan3 siRNA (lanes 11–15). One day later, β-globin mRNA was induced by tetracycline for 2 h. Cells were harvested at the specified time after the shutoff of β-globin mRNA transcription. Fully deadenylated mRNA (A0) was marked as in Fig. 1A. (B) The average length of the poly(A) tails at each time point was measured. (C) The distribution of β-globin mRNA was visualized by quantifying the signal intensity from (A). (D) Proteins were analyzed by Western blotting with the indicated antibodies. The three leftmost lanes, which analyzed two-fold dilutions of cellular protein, show that the conditions used for Western blotting were semi-quantitative. (E–H) As in (A–D), except that cells were co-transfected with a pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG-cMyc 3′ UTR reporter plasmid, pCMV-5 × Flag-GST-CAT reference plasmid, and either Luciferase siRNA ((E) lanes 1–5) or Tob1/Tob2 siRNAs ((E) lanes 6–10).

we conclude that arsenite induces the degradation of Tob and Pan3 to inhibit mRNA deadenylation.

3.4. Arsenite-induced inhibition of mRNA deadenylation is not dependent on HRI-mediated inhibition of translation

Arsenite not only induces stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail, but also inhibits protein synthesis by phosphorylating the initiation factor eIF2α, which disrupts the eIF2–GTP–$tRNA^{Met}$ ternary complex [25]. This suggests that the inhibition of mRNA deadenylation by arsenite might be dependent on the inhibition of translation during arsenite stress. A previous study demonstrated that the arsenite-induced phosphorylation of eIF2α and inhibition of protein synthesis requires heme-regulated inhibitor kinase (HRI) [26]. Thus, we performed the knockdown of HRI and analyzed the deadenylation kinetics of reporter mRNA during arsenite stress. T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with a plasmid expressing β-globin mRNA or c-myc mRNA, a reference plasmid expressing 5 × Flag-EGFP mRNA or 5 × Flag-GST-CAT mRNA as a transfection/loading control, and either HRI siRNA or control siRNA, and deadenylation kinetics were monitored as in Fig. 1. Arsenite induced the phosphorylation of eIF2α, which was completely inhibited by the knockdown of HRI. Under this HRI knockdown condition, the arsenite-induced inhibition of mRNA deadenylation

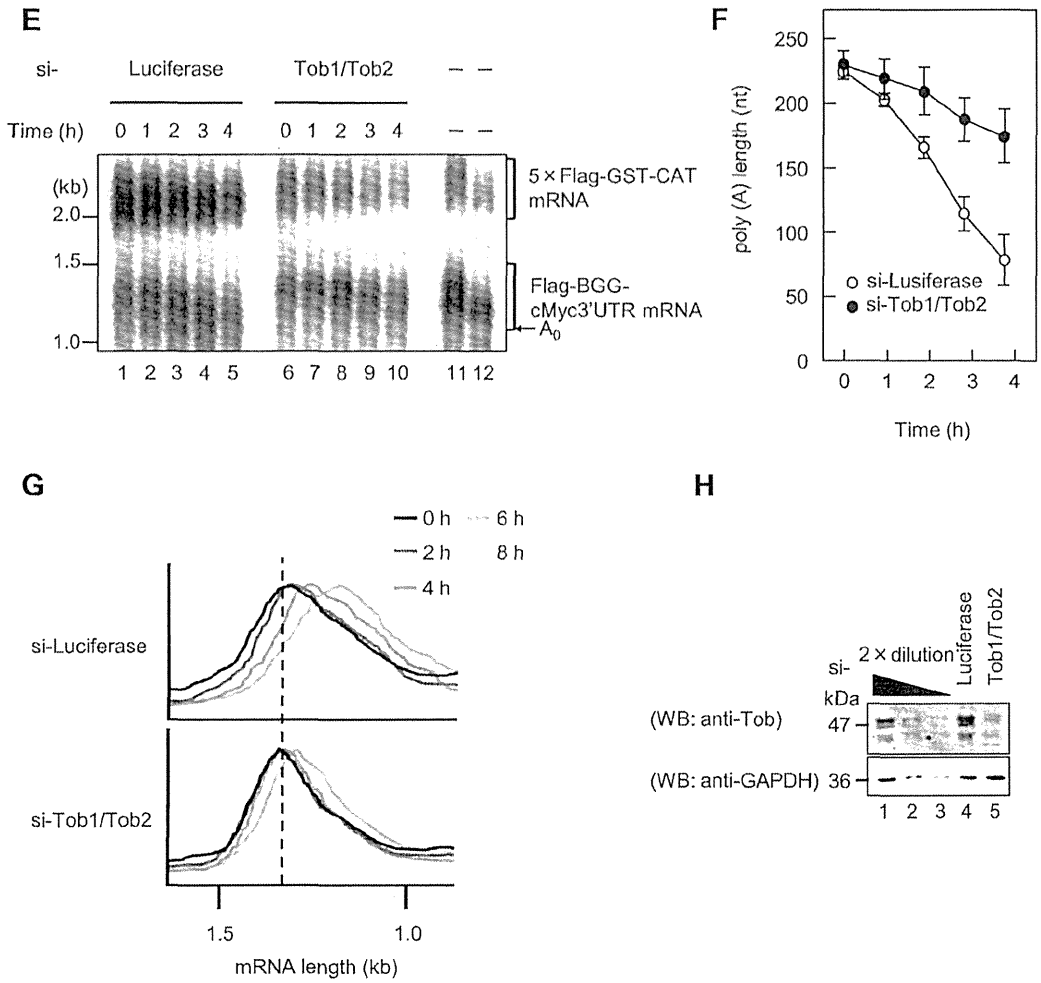

Fig. 3 (*continued*)

was still observed for both β-globin (Fig. 4B, compare lanes 11–15 and 16–20, and C) and c-myc reporter mRNAs (Fig. 4D, compare lanes 11–15 and 16–20, and E). These results indicate that arsenite inhibits mRNA deadenylation irrespective of the HRI-mediated phosphorylation of eIF2α.

4. Discussion

In yeast and mammals, cellular stress generally induces stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail. However, the mechanism underlying this phenomenon has not been elucidated. Stress-induced stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail is recognized as a global phenomenon regardless of the mRNA species [6–8]. This prompted us to speculate that the factors involved in general mRNA deadenylation may be targeted by stress. We previously proposed a mechanism of mRNA deadenylation, in which the termination factor eRF3 dissociates from the poly(A)-binding protein PABPC1 after the termination of translation, and in turn, the deadenylase complexes, Pan2–Pan3 and Tob–Caf1–Ccr4, associate with PABPC1 to degrade the poly(A) tail [15,16]. Thus, we analyzed the expression levels of Tob, Pan3, PABPC1, eRF3, Caf1, and Pan2 proteins during arsenite stress and found that the levels of Tob and Pan3 proteins are selectively decreased during arsenite stress (Fig. 2A). The arsenite-induced degradation of Tob, but not Pan3, appears to be mediated by the proteasome. The siRNA-mediated knockdown of Tob and Pan3 can recapitulate stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail observed during arsenite stress (Fig. 3). Although arsenite also induces the inhibition of translation by activating the eIF2α kinase HRI, the arsenite-induced inhibition of deadenylation can be observed under HRI-depleted conditions (Fig. 4). From these results, we conclude that the stress-induced stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail is caused by the degradation of Tob and Pan3. Since the two PAM2-containing proteins Tob and Pan3 mediate the recruitment of Caf1–Ccr4 and Pan2 deadenylases to PABPC1-bound mRNA, it is conceivable that the proteolytic degradation of Tob and Pan3 leads to the dissociation of Caf1–Ccr4 and Pan2 deadenylases from mRNA and, thus, inhibits deadenylation.

We previously showed that, in addition to the role of Tob in the general deadenylation and decay of mRNA [15,16], Tob also functions in the transcript-specific regulation of deadenylation through binding to sequence-specific RNA-binding proteins, CPEB and CPEB3. Tob recruits Caf1 to CPEB and CPEB3 to accelerate deadenylation and decay of their specific targets, including c-myc and AMPA receptor (GluR2) mRNAs [18,20]. The transcript-specific regulation by Tob–Caf1–Ccr4 via binding to CPEBs appears to be dominant over the general regulation of deadenylation via PABPC1 [20]. In this study, we examined c-myc mRNA as a representative example of short-lived mRNAs and found that c-myc mRNA is also stabilized during arsenite stress (Fig. 1D). The siRNA-mediated knockdown of Tob can recapitulate stabilization (Fig. 3). Thus, even in the case of unstable c-myc mRNA, stress-induced stabilization of the poly(A) tail is also explained by the degradation of Tob.

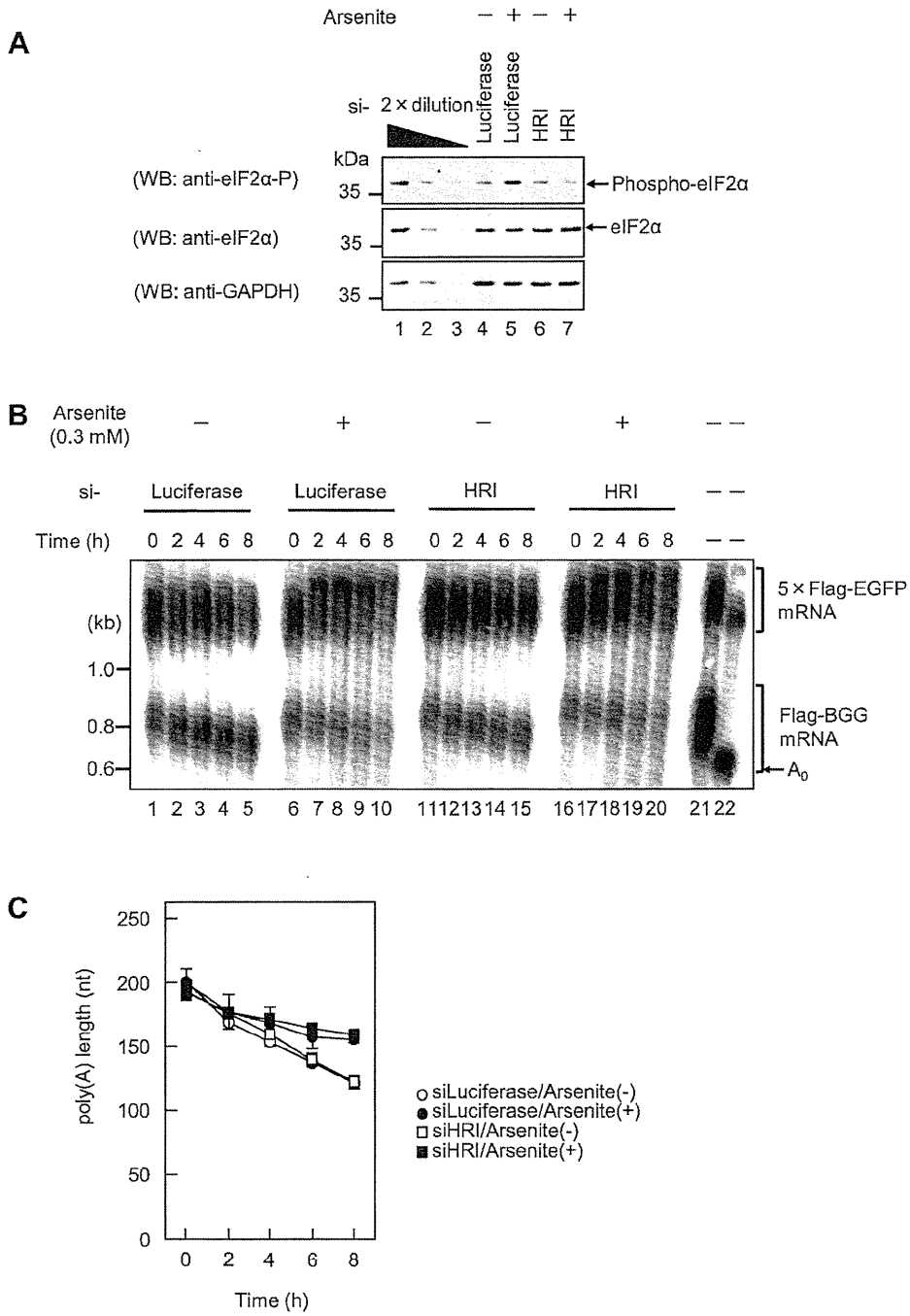

Fig. 4. Inhibition of mRNA deadenylation during arsenite-induced oxidative stress occurs independently of the HRI-mediated phosphorylation of eIF2α. (A) T-REx HeLa cells were transfected with Luciferase siRNA or HRI siRNA. Cells were harvested after exposure to 0.3 mM arsenite for 2 h. eIF2α and its phosphorylation were analyzed by Western blotting with the indicated antibodies. (B) T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with a pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG reporter plasmid, pCMV-5 × Flag-EGFP reference plasmid, and either Luciferase siRNA (lanes 1–10) or HRI siRNA (lanes 11–20). A pulse-chase analysis was performed as in Fig. 1A. (C) The average length of the poly(A) tail was measured. (D) and (E) As in (B) and (C), except that cells were co-transfected with a pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG-cMyc 3′ UTR reporter plasmid and either Luciferase siRNA ((D) lanes 1–10) or HRI siRNA ((D) lanes 11–20).

We here showed that Pan3 as well as Tob is selectively down-regulated during arsenite stress. However, the degradation of Pan3 is slower than that of Tob (Fig. 2A) and does not appear to be mediated by proteasome (Fig. 2B). Furthermore the knockdown of Pan3 leads to modest stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail over that of Tob (Fig. 3B). Consistent with previous findings in which Tob–Caf1–Ccr4 was identified as the major mRNA deadenylase, stress-induced stabilization of the mRNA poly(A) tail appears to be mainly due to the degradation of Tob.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

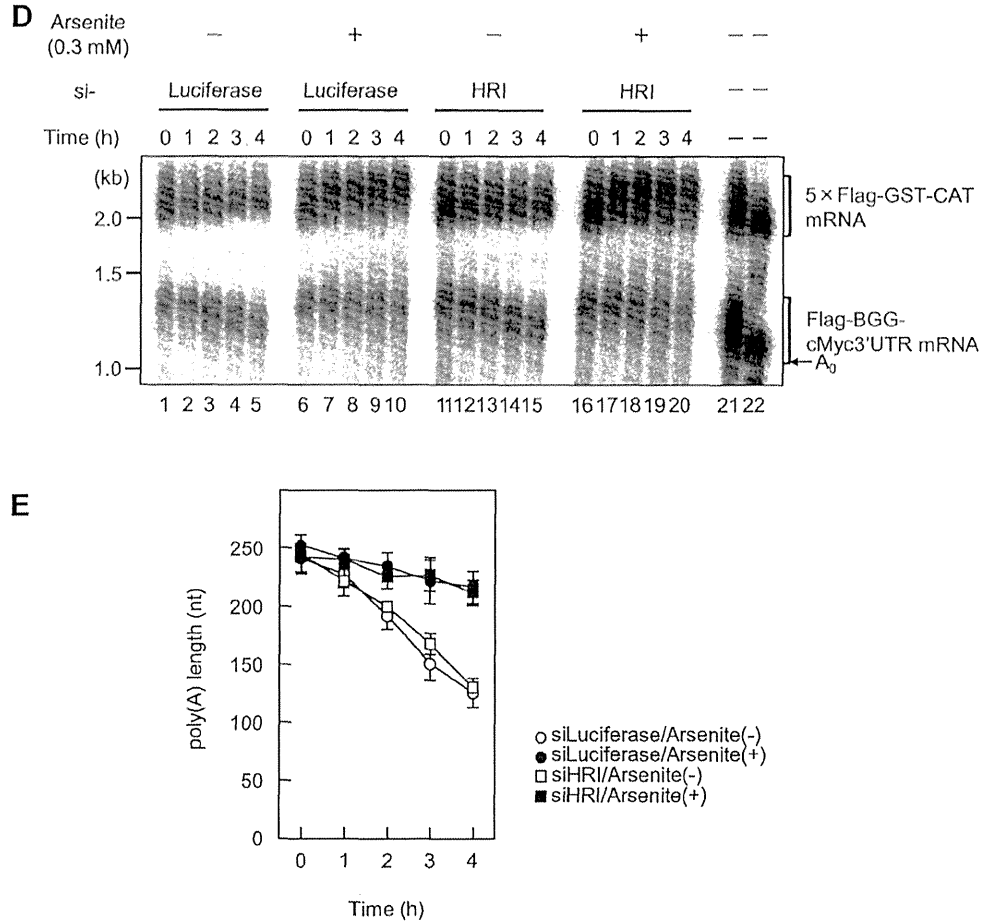

Fig. 4 (*continued*)

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bbrc.2014.11.015.

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The processed isoform of the translation termination factor eRF3 localizes to the nucleus to interact with the ARF tumor suppressor

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ABSTRACT

The eukaryotic releasing factor eRF3 is a multifunctional protein that plays pivotal roles in translation termination as well as the initiation of mRNA decay. eRF3 also functions in the regulation of apoptosis; eRF3 is cleaved at Ala73 by an as yet unidentified protease into processed isoform of eRF3 (p-eRF3), which interacts with the inhibitors of apoptosis proteins (IAPs). The binding of p-eRF3 with IAPs leads to the release of active caspases from IAPs, which promotes apoptosis. Although full-length eRF3 is localized exclusively in the cytoplasm, p-eRF3 localizes in the nucleus as well as the cytoplasm. We here focused on the role of p-eRF3 in the nucleus. We identified leptomycin-sensitive nuclear export signal (NES) at amino acid residues 61–71 immediately upstream of the cleavage site Ala73. Thus, the proteolytic cleavage of eRF3 into p-eRF3 leads to release an amino-terminal fragment containing NES to allow the relocalization of eRF3 into the nucleus. Consistent with this, p-eRF3 more strongly interacted with the nuclear ARF tumor suppressor than full-length eRF3. These results suggest that while p-eRF3 interacts with IAPs to promote apoptosis in the cytoplasm, p-eRF3 also has some roles in regulating cell death in the nucleus.

1. Introduction

eRF3 is an evolutionarily conserved polypeptide chain releasing factor that functions in translation termination and termination-coupled events. The yeast eRF3 gene *GST1* was initially identified as essential gene for G1-to-S phase transition in the cell cycle [1]. The gene was also cloned as the omnipotent suppressor *SUP35* [2]. Two eRF3 genes, *GSPT1* and *GSPT2*, have been identified to date in mammals [3,4], the products of which were later renamed as eRF3a and eRF3b, respectively [5]. eRF3 consists of two regions, an amino-terminal unstructured domain (N-domain) and translation elongation factor eEF1A-like GTP-binding domain (C-domain). The role of eRF3 is well-established in translation termination, in which eRF3 interacts with another releasing factor, eRF1 in its C-domain to accelerate the polypeptide chain releasing reaction catalyzed by the ribosome [6–9].

On the other hand, the N-domain of eRF3 is not necessary for the termination reaction, but interacts with the poly(A)-binding protein PABP to play a pivotal role in the initiation of mRNA decay [10]. eRF3, via an interaction with PABP, also functions in the translation cycle by efficiently recycling the terminating ribosome to the initiation complex [11]. Furthermore, eRF3 was shown to be involved in the initiation of nonsense-mediated mRNA decay (NMD), which rapidly degrades aberrant mRNAs containing premature termination codons [12]. Thus, eRF3 is a multifunctional regulator of gene expression.

The proteolytically processed isoform of eRF3 (p-eRF3) acts as a regulator of apoptosis. eRF3 has been shown to be cleaved at the 73A residue by an unknown protease, leading to the exposure of a conserved inhibitor of apoptosis protein (IAP)-binding motif (IBM) at its N-terminus [13]. Smac/DIABLO and Omi/HtrA2 are IBM-containing proteins that have been extensively examined in humans. Both proteins are localized in the intermembrane space of mitochondria and are released into the cytosol during apoptosis to interact with IAPs, which leads to the activation of caspase due to their liberation from IAP inhibition [14–20]. In a similar manner, the N-terminally processed p-eRF3 also promotes apoptosis by binding with IAPs [13]. This study defined eRF3 as a novel regulator of cell death. The above-described functions of eRF3 are thought to occur in the cytoplasm; however, this study suggested that p-eRF3 may also function in the nucleus; p-eRF3 is localized not only in

Abbreviations: IAP, inhibitor of apoptosis protein; NES, nuclear export signal; ORF, open reading frame.

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the cytoplasm, but also in the nucleus, whereas full-length eRF3 is localized exclusively in the cytoplasm. This prompted us to investigate the mechanism responsible for the nucleocytoplasmic shuttling of eRF3 and the role of p-eRF3 in the nucleus. In the present study, we demonstrate that the amino acid sequence (60–71) of eRF3, which is localized immediately upstream of the cleavage site, acts as a functional NES, and the removal of NES by an unknown protease allows p-eRF3 to localize in the nucleus and interact with the nuclear tumor suppressor ARF, which is known to inhibit cell growth in a p53-dependent or -independent manner [21]. The role of p-eRF3 in the nucleus has been discussed herein.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Cell culture and transfection

HeLa cells were cultured in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (Nissui) supplemented with 5% fetal bovine serum (Sigma) and maintained at 37 °C in 5% CO_2. NIH3T3 cells were cultured in DMEM supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma). HeLa cells were transfected with plasmid using Polyethyleneimine MAX (Polysciences). NIH3T3 cells were transfected with plasmids using LipofectAMINE 2000 (Invitrogen).

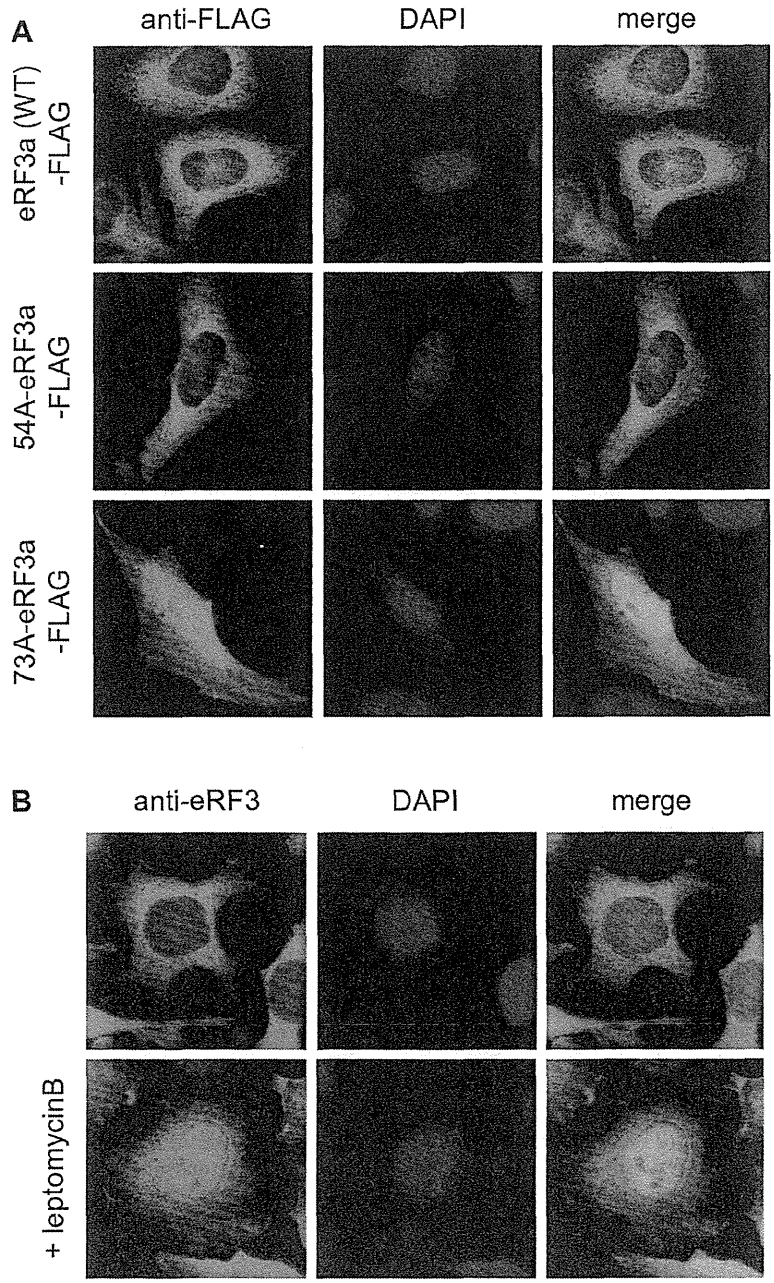

Fig. 1. p-eRF3 localizes in the nucleus as well as the cytoplasm, and is exported from the nucleus in a CRM1-dependent manner. (A) HeLa cells were transfected with pCMV-MycFLAG-Ub-hGSPT1, pCMV-MycFLAG-Ub-(54A)-hGSPT1, and pCMV-MycFLAG-Ub-(73A)-hGSPT1 expressing Ub-(wt)-eRF3a-FLAG, Ub-(54A)-eRF3a-FLAG, and Ub-(73A)-eRF3a-FLAG proteins, respectively, and cells were stained using an anti-FLAG antibody combined with anti-mouse Alexa 488. Nuclei were stained with DAPI. The localization of the FLAG-tagged eRF3 was observed using fluorescence microscopy. (B) HeLa cells treated with or without leptomycin B for 4 h were stained by an anti-eRF3 antibody combined with anti-rabbit Alexa 488. Nuclei were stained with DAPI. The localization of endogenous eRF3 was observed using fluorescence microscopy.

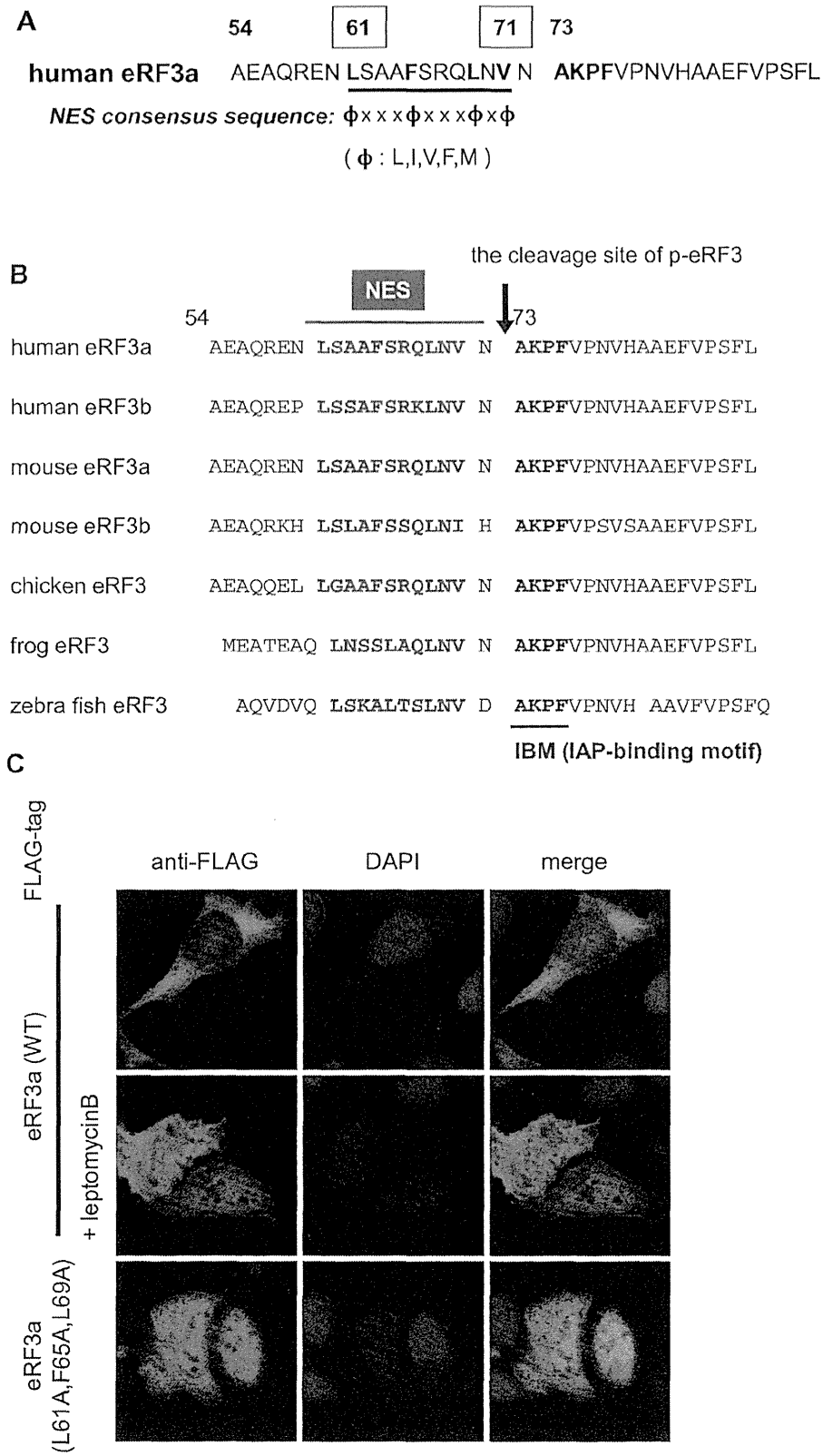

Fig. 2. Identification of the nuclear export signal (NES) motif in eRF3. (A) The leptomycin-sensitive nuclear export signal (NES) in human eRF3a was identified at amino acid residues 61–71 immediately upstream of the cleavage site Ala73. (B) The alignment of amino acid sequences around NES and the cleavage site of p-eRF3. The amino acid sequences of human eRF3a, human eRF3b, mouse eRF3a, mouse eRF3b, chicken eRF3, frog eRF3, and zebra fish eRF3 are shown. (C) HeLa cells were transfected with pFLAG-CMV2-hGSPT1 and pFLAG-CMV2-hGSPT1 (L61A,F65A,L69A), expressing FLAG-eRF3a and FLAG-eRF3a (L61A,F65A,L69A), respectively, and the cells were stained by an anti-FLAG antibody combined with anti-mouse Alexa 488. Nuclei were stained with DAPI. The localization of FLAG-tagged eRF3a was observed using fluorescence microscopy. HeLa cells expressing FLAG-eRF3a, which were treated with leptomycin B, were also shown (+leptomycin B).

2.2. Plasmid

To construct pFLAG-CMV2-hGSPT1 (L61A,F65A,L69A), the corresponding region of hGSPT1 cDNA was amplified by inverse PCR using primer pairs NH149 (5′-AAC GTC AAC GCC AAG CCC TTC-3′)/NH150 (5′-GGC TTG CCG GCT GGC GGC CGC GCT GGC GTT CTC CCG CTG-3′), and pFLAG-CMV2-hGSPT1 [4] as a template. To construct pCMV-5xMyc-p14ARF, ORF of p14ARF was amplified by PCR using primer pairs NH174 (5′-GGC GAA TTC ATG GTG CGC AGG TTC TTG G-3′)/NH175 (5′-TCC TCA GCC AGG TCC ACG GGC-3′), and random primer cDNA library obtained from HeLa cells as a template. The resulting cDNA fragment was digested with EcoRI and inserted into the EcoRI and EcoRV sites of pCMV-5xMyc [22].

2.3. Immunostaining

HeLa cells grown on cover glass were fixed by 4% paraformaldehyde (PFA) in PBS(-) for 15 min. After washing 2 times with PBS(-) containing 10 mM glycine, the cells were permeabilized by PBS(-) containing 1% goat serum and 0.1% Triton X-100 for 15 min. The cells were then washed once with PBS(-) and incubated with an anti-FLAG antibody (Sigma) (1/400 dilution) or anti-eRF3 antibody [23] in PBS(-) containing 1% goat serum in a moisture box overnight. After washing 3 times with PBS(-), cells were incubated with Alexa 488 (Invitrogen) (1/400) and 4′, 6-diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI) (Dojindo) (1/1000) in PBS(-) containing 1% goat serum for 90 min, and were then washed 3 times with PBS(-). The cover glass was mounted on a glass slide using Prolong Gold (Invitrogen).

2.4. Immunoprecipitation

NIH3T3 cells were lysed in buffer A (20 mM Tris–HCl (pH 7.5), 150 mM NaCl, 0.5% NP-40, 1 mM EDTA, 1 mM dithiothreitol, 0.1 mM PMSF, 2 μg/ml aprotinin, 2 μg/ml leupeptin, and 2 μg/ml pepstatin A) and cells were placed on ice for 15 min after sonication (10 pulses). The supernatant was prepared by centrifugation at 15,000 rpm for 15 min at 4 °C and incubated with anti-Flag IgG agarose (Sigma) for 30 min in the cold room. The resin was washed three times with buffer A. Bound protein was eluted with SDS–PAGE sample buffer and analyzed by Western blotting.

3. Results

3.1. Removal of the amino acid residues (54–72) of eRF3 is responsible for the nuclear localization of p-eRF3

A previous study demonstrated that p-eRF3 interacted with IAPs to promote apoptosis [13]. This study also reported that while full-length eRF3 localized exclusively in the cytoplasm and associated with ER, p-eRF3 was released from the ER and localized both in the cytoplasm and nucleus. These results suggest that eRF3 may be a nucleocytoplasmic shuttling protein. Thus, we attempted to elucidate the mechanism responsible for regulating the subcellular localization of eRF3/p-eRF3. Because p-eRF3 is generated by proteolytic cleavage at Ala73, we hypothesized that the N-terminal region (1–72) released from eRF3 may contain a signal that defines cytoplasmic localization. To examine this possibility, we analyzed the subcellular localization of the N-terminal deletion mutants of eRF3. HeLa cells were transfected with plasmids expressing ubiquitin (Ub)-tagged eRF3a-fusion proteins, in which ubiquitin was fused with eRF3a deletion mutants [23]. According to the Ub fusion protein approach, the Ub moiety of the expressed fusion proteins is cleaved by multiple ATP-dependent proteases, and eRF3a fragments without Ub can be produced [13]. We confirmed that p-eRF3 (73A-eRF3) localized both in the cytoplasm and nucleus, whereas full-length eRF3 localized exclusively in the cytoplasm (Fig. 1A). As we already demonstrated in our previous study that the caspase-cleaved form of eRF3 (33Q-eRF3) localized in the cytoplasm [23], we examined 54A-eRF3 to further narrow the region of eRF3 required for its cytoplasmic localization. 54A-eRF3 exhibited cytoplasmic localization (Fig. 1A). These results indicate that the 19-amino-acid region (54–72) contains a signal that defines the cytoplasmic localization of eRF3.

3.2. eRF3 is exported from the nucleus in a CRM1-dependent manner

Since the CRM1-dependent nuclear export system has already established in detail, we next examined the effects of Leptomycin B, a specific inhibitor of CRM1, on the subcellular localization of eRF3. As shown in Fig. 1B, eRF3 localized not only in the cytoplasm, but also in the nucleus following the Leptomycin B treatment, which indicates that eRF3 is a nucleocytoplasmic shuttling protein that is exported from the nucleus in a manner dependent on CRM1.

3.3. Identification of a functional nuclear export signal (NES) in eRF3

The above results identified eRF3 as a dynamic protein, the cellular localization of which was regulated through the CRM1-dependent nuclear export pathway and the 19-amino-acid region (54–72) contained a cytoplasmic localization signal. We noticed a stretch of hydrophobic residues with a characteristic spacing that resembled leucine-rich NES in the 19-amino-acid region (54–72) (Fig. 2A) [24]. This sequence was highly conserved from zebra fish to humans (Fig. 2B). To confirm that the NES-like sequence identified in eRF3a acts as a functional NES, we introduced alanine mutations into the consensus hydrophobic residues (61LSAAFSRQLNV71). eRF3a (L61A/F65A/L69A) localized both in the cytoplasm and nucleus, as observed for wild type eRF3a in cells treated with LMB (Fig. 2C). We also obtained similar results by using GFP-fused eRF3a (data not shown). These results indicate that 61LSAAFSRQLNV71 of eRF3a is a functional NES. Moreover, p-eRF3 that fused with the amino acid sequence (60–71) of eRF3a at its C-terminus again re-localized exclusively in the cytoplasm, which further supported our conclusion (data not shown). Thus, the proteolytic cleavage of eRF3 by an unknown protease leads to the removal of the NES located immediately upstream of the cleavage site to produce p-eRF3, which in turn allows p-eRF3 to localize in the nucleus as well as the cytoplasm.

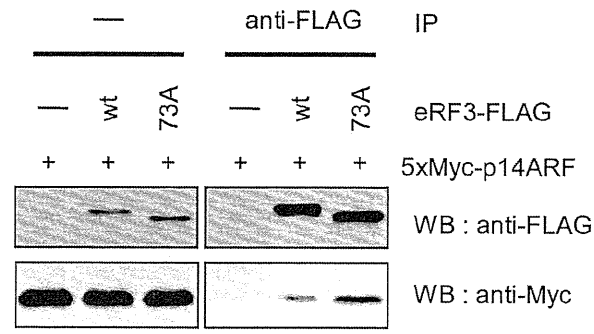

Fig. 3. p-eRF3 interacts with the ARF tumor suppressor in living cells. NIH3T3 cells were transfected with pCMV-5xMyc-p14ARF and either pCMV-MycFLAG, pCMV-MycFLAG-Ub-hGSPT1/eRF3a or pCMV-MycFLAG-Ub-(73A)-hGSPT1/eRF3a. Whole cell extracts were immunoprecipitated (IP) using an anti-FLAG antibody. The immunoprecipitates and inputs were analyzed by Western blotting using anti-FLAG and anti-Myc antibodies.

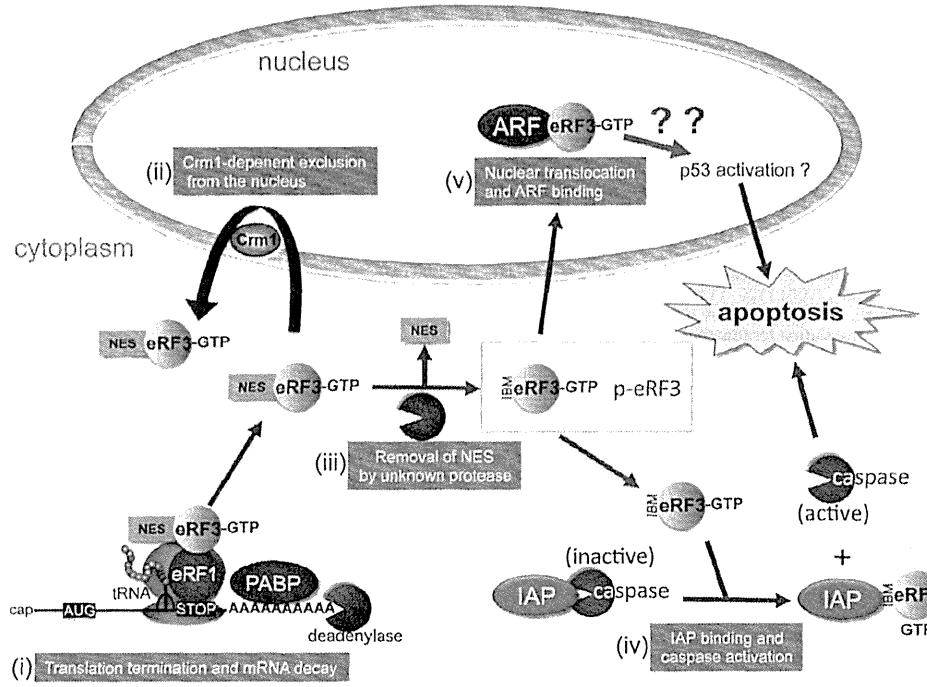

Fig. 4. A hypothetical model describing the possible role of nucleocytoplasmic shuttling of eRF3. (i) In the cytoplasm, eRF3 binds with eRF1 to regulate the termination of translation and termination-coupled initiation of mRNA decay. (ii) NES located immediately upstream of the IAP-binding motif (IBM) of eRF3 acts as a signal to exclude eRF3 from the nucleus. (iii) The removal of NES by an unknown protease produces p-eRF3, which exposes IBM at the N-terminus. (iv) The binding of p-eRF3 IBM with IAPs disrupts their interaction with the initiator caspase-9 and effector caspases-3 and -7, which allows the activation of caspases. (v) The removal of NES allows the nuclear translocation of p-eRF3 and its interaction with the nuclear tumor suppressor ARF.

3.4. p-eRF3 interacts with p14ARF

To gain further insight into the role of nuclear translocated p-eRF3, we next examined the interaction between p-eRF3 and the tumor suppressor p14ARF. A previous study identified p14ARF as a binding partner of eRF3 by yeast two-hybrid screening. eRF3 was shown to bind to p14ARF in an *in vitro* binding assay [25]. However, the interaction between full-length eRF3 and p14ARF was not demonstrated in living cells because eRF3 was localized exclusively in the cytoplasm, whereas p14ARF was in the nucleus. Thus, we expressed 5xMyc-tagged p14ARF and either Flag-eRF3a or Flag-p-eRF3a (73A-eRF3) in NIH3T3 cells, and performed immunoprecipitation experiments with the anti-Flag antibody. As shown in Fig. 3, p-eRF3a (73A-eRF3a) bound more strongly with p14ARF than full-length eRF3a.

4. Discussion

A previous study demonstrated that eRF3 is proteolytically processed into an IAP-binding protein to promote apoptosis [13]. The binding of p-eRF3 with IAPs disrupts their interaction with the initiator caspase-9 and effector caspases-3 and -7, which allows the activation of caspases. In the present study, we have newly demonstrated the following: (i) eRF3 is a nucleocytoplasmic shuttling protein and is exported from the nucleus in a manner dependent on CRM1; (ii) 61LSAAFSRQLNV71 located immediately upstream of the proteolytic cleavage site of eRF3 acts as a functional NES; (iii) the removal of NES allows p-eRF3 to localize to the nucleus as well as cytoplasm; (iv) p-eRF3 more strongly interacts with the nuclear ARF tumor suppressor than full-length eRF3 (see Fig. 4). Thus, the proteolytic cleavage of eRF3 at Ala73 leads to the removal of NES located immediately upstream of the cleavage site to produce p-eRF3, which in turn allows p-eRF3 to translocate to the nucleus and interact with p14ARF. p14ARF is best known for its induction of p53-dependent cell death or growth arrest; p14ARF binds to inactivate Mdm2, an E3 ubiquitin ligase for p53, and stabilize p53 to stimulate the transcriptional activity of p53. Therefore, besides promoting apoptosis by binding to IAPs, p-eRF3 may translocate to the nucleus to further promote apoptosis through the p14ARF-p53 pathway. This possibility is now under investigation in our laboratory.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Antiproliferative protein Tob directly regulates c-myc proto-oncogene expression through cytoplasmic polyadenylation element-binding protein CPEB

K Ogami, N Hosoda, Y Funakoshi and S Hoshino

The regulation of mRNA deadenylation constitutes a pivotal mechanism of the post-transcriptional control of gene expression. Here we show that the antiproliferative protein Tob, a component of the Caf1–Ccr4 deadenylase complex, is involved in regulating the expression of the proto-oncogene c-myc. The c-myc mRNA contains *cis* elements (CPEs) in its 3′-untranslated region (3′-UTR), which are recognized by the cytoplasmic polyadenylation element-binding protein (CPEB). CPEB recruits Caf1 deadenylase through interaction with Tob to form a ternary complex, CPEB–Tob–Caf1, and negatively regulates the expression of c-myc by accelerating the deadenylation and decay of its mRNA. In quiescent cells, c-myc mRNA is destabilized by the *trans*-acting complex (CPEB–Tob–Caf1), while in cells stimulated by the serum, both Tob and Caf1 are released from CPEB, and c-Myc expression is induced early after stimulation by the stabilization of its mRNA as an 'immediate-early gene'. Collectively, these results indicate that Tob is a key factor in the regulation of c-myc gene expression, which is essential for cell growth. Thus, Tob appears to function in the control of cell growth at least, in part, by regulating the expression of c-myc.

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Keywords: Tob; Caf1; CPEB; mRNA decay; deadenylation

INTRODUCTION

In eukaryotes, the mRNA poly(A) tail has pivotal roles in the post-transcriptional control of gene expression. The 3′ poly(A) tail interacts with the 5′ cap to circularize mRNA, which leads to a synergistic activation of translation.[1,2] Also, shortening of the poly(A) tail, termed deadenylation, is the rate-limiting step in general mRNA decay.[3] Thus, the regulation of the poly(A) tail length contributes greatly to the control of gene expression in terms of both translation and mRNA stability.[4,5] Especially in oocyte maturation and early embryonic development, which occur in the absence of transcription, gene expression is absolutely regulated by the polyadenylation and deadenylation of maternal mRNA. In this case, CPE-containing pre-mRNA such as cyclin B1 acquires a long poly(A) tail in the nucleus that is subsequently shortened when transported to the cytoplasm. The poly(A) tail length is controlled by two cytoplasmic polyadenylation element-binding protein (CPEB)-associated proteins: a poly(A)-specific ribonuclease (PARN) deadenylase[6] and a poly(A) polymerase Gld2.[7] CPEB recruits PARN to the CPE-containing mRNA and accelerates the deadenylation reaction. Upon oocyte maturation, CPEB phosphorylation leads to the dissociation of PARN from the RNP complex and instead Gld2 associated with CPEB catalyzes default polyadenylation.[8] Thus, cytoplasmic polyadenylation activates the translation of specific mRNAs.

In somatic cells, however, poly(A) tail length is regulated mostly by deadenylation that is generally catalyzed by two major mRNA deadenylase complexes, Pan2–Pan3 and Caf1–Ccr4.[9] The former consists of the catalytic subunit Pan2 and regulatory subunit Pan3.[10] Pan3 binds to the poly(A)-binding protein PABPC1 by using the PAM2 motif and makes Pan2 accessible to the substrate poly(A), which leads to the activation of deadenylation.[10] On the other hand, both the Caf1 and Ccr4 subunits of the latter complex have the catalytic activities of the deadenylase.[11–13] The antiproliferative protein Tob forms a complex with Caf1–Ccr4[14] and mediates the binding of the deadenylases to PABPC1.[15] As in the case of Pan3, Tob binds to PABPC1 via the PAM2 motif and makes Caf1–Ccr4 accessible to the PABPC1-bound poly(A), which also leads to the activation of deadenylation.[16,17] We have previously found that the termination of translation triggers mRNA deadenylation, and proposed an initiation mechanism of mRNA decay: after translation termination, the termination complex eRF1–eRF3 is released from PABPC1, and in turn the two deadenylase complexes, Pan2–Pan3 and Caf1–Ccr4, bind to PABPC1 to degrade the poly(A) tail of the mRNA.[17] The translation termination factor eRF3 also contains PAM2 motifs, and competition between eRF3 and the two deadenylase complexes for the binding of PABPC1 is the key to this model.[17,18]

In addition to the decay of general mRNA, Tob in a complex with Caf1 also has an important role in the regulation of specific mRNA. Tob binds directly to a sequence-specific RNA-binding protein, CPEB3, and recruits Caf1 to the target of CPEB3.[19] The binding of CPEB3 to the target, AMPA receptor (GluR2) mRNA, leads to accelerated deadenylation and decay of the message and inhibition of its expression. Thus, Tob is thought to function in learning and memory by regulating the expression of the AMPA receptor.[19]

Tob is a multifunctional protein involved not only in learning and memory[20,21] but also in cell cycle progression,[22,23] spermatogenesis,[24] embryonic development,[25] osteogenesis[26]

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and T-cell activation.[27] Among its known biological functions, Tob's role as a negative regulator of the cell cycle is well established. Ectopic expression of Tob or its paralog Tob2 results in the inhibition of cell proliferation.[14,22,23] Tob suppresses cyclin D1 expression upstream of Rb phosphorylation and inhibits G1-to-S phase transition.[23] However, the role of Tob in mRNA deadenylation with respect to cell growth regulation remains to be determined.

Here, we show that Tob directly regulates c-myc oncogene expression during G1-to-S phase transition. In quiescent cells, Tob forms a ternary complex CPEB–Tob–Caf1 and recruits Caf1 deadenylase to the target c-myc mRNA to degrade rapidly the message. After serum stimulation, Tob and Caf1 dissociate from CPEB, which leads to the stabilization of the mRNA and activation of its gene expression. Thus, Tob appears to function in the control of cell growth at least, in part, by regulating the expression of c-myc.

RESULTS

Tob directly binds CPEB to form a ternary complex with Caf1 deadenylase

We have previously shown that Tob directly binds to form a complex with the sequence-specific RNA-binding proteins CPEB3 and CPEB4.[19] Detailed analysis of the interaction revealed that Tob binds to the carboxyl-terminal RNA-binding domain of CPEB3/4. Since the RNA-binding domain is highly conserved among CPEB2–4 (>95% identity), and distantly related CPEB still has a homologous domain (~40–50% identity), we speculated that Tob also binds to CPEB. Thus, we first examined the interaction with a glutathione *S*-transferase (GST) pull-down assay. GST-Tob (1–285) and MBP-CPEB, which had been prepared from *Escherichia coli* with >95% purity, were mixed and pulled down by glutathione sepharose beads. Western blot analysis with anti-MBP antibody revealed the presence of MBP-CPEB, while it was not detected in the control experiment with GST (Figure 1a). The interaction was further confirmed with co-immunoprecipitation experiment. When lysate of HeLa cells expressing 5 × Flag-CPEB, 5 × Myc-Tob and 5 × Myc-Caf1 was immunoprecipitated with anti-Flag antibody, the precipitated fraction contained 5 × Myc-Tob (Figure 1b). Also, we have confirmed the presence of 5 × Myc-Caf1 in the precipitate. The precipitated amount of 5 × Myc-Caf1 was increased when 5 × Myc-Tob was expressed (Figure 1b, compare lanes 5 and 6). These interactions seemed not to be mediated by RNA since the binding experiments were performed in the presence of RNase A. These results indicate that Tob directly binds CPEB, as in the case of CPEB3 and CPEB4, to form a ternary complex with Caf1 deadenylase.

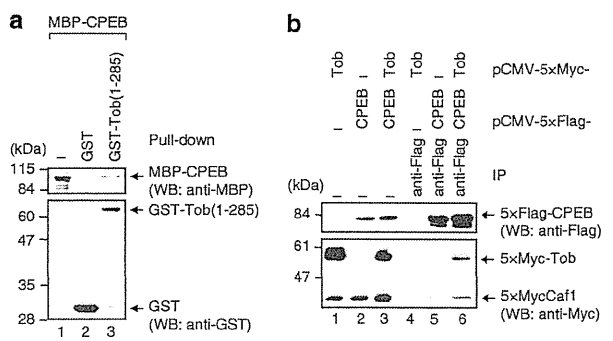

Figure 1. Tob directly binds CPEB to form a ternary complex with Caf1 deadenylase. (**a**) GST or GST-Tob was immobilized on glutathione sepharose resin and incubated with MBP-CPEB. The bound proteins (lanes 2 and 3) and the input (lane 1) were analyzed by western blotting (WB) with the indicated antibodies. (**b**) HeLa cells were transfected with pCMV-5 × Myc-Caf1, pCMV-5 × Myc-Tob, and either pCMV-5 × Flag-CPEB or pCMV-5 × Flag. The cell extracts were subjected to immunoprecipitation (IP) using anti-Flag antibody in the presence of RNase A. The immunoprecipitates (lanes 4–6) and inputs (lanes 1–3) were analyzed by western blotting with the indicated antibodies.

CPEB represses expression of c-myc 3′-UTR reporter gene by destabilizing its mRNA

The observed interaction between CPEB, Tob and Caf1 led us to speculate that CPEB's target mRNAs are regulated by deadenylation. Previous study has shown that c-myc mRNA, which contains CPEs and CPE-like sequences in its 3′-UTR (Figure 2a), is one of the targets of CPEB.[28] In an attempt to determine the significance of the interaction between CPEB, Tob and Caf1, a *β-globin* gene (BGG) reporter appended with the c-myc 3′-UTR (c-myc 3′-UTR reporter) was constructed, and the effect of CPEB on the expression of the reporter was examined by western and northern blot analyses. Exogenously expressed CPEB significantly lowered the level of BGG reporter protein in a dose-dependent manner (Figures 2b and d). This result seems not merely to be a consequence of translational repression because CPEB also reduces the level of the reporter mRNA (Figures 2c and e). The steady-state level of the reporter mRNA was reduced to ~30% by CPEB (Figure 2e), where that of the protein was reduced to ~5% (Figure 2d), suggesting that CPEB negatively regulates the reporter gene expression also at the mRNA level. The ability of CPEB to reduce the reporter mRNA and protein expression is dependent on its binding to the mRNA, as CPEB did not significantly affect the expression of the reporter gene with mutated CPEs (Figures 2b and c, lanes 4–6).

To determine whether CPEB reduces the c-myc mRNA level by promoting mRNA decay, we conducted a transcriptional pulse-chase analysis by using Tet-on system (Figure 2f). The BGG with the c-myc 3′-UTR (c-myc 3′-UTR reporter) was placed under the control of the 'Tet-on' promoter. Transcription was allowed to proceed for 2 h by adding tetracycline in T-REx HeLa cells. Cells were then washed three times to block further transcription, and total RNA was prepared from the cells sequentially after transcription was shut off. Northern blot analysis showed that the stability of c-myc 3′-UTR reporter mRNA was decreased approximately twofold by the presence of CPEB (Figures 2f and g). The signal intensity of the band was quantified along the length of the mRNA and plotted as a function of mRNA size (Figure 2h). The position of the fully deadenylated RNA (A_0) was determined by treating the steady-state mRNA with oligo (dT)/RNase H. The c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA was gradually shortened (Figure 2h, upper panel), while in cells expressing CPEB, the mRNA migrates faster to the A_0 position (Figure 2h, middle panel). The observed size difference is due to the difference in the length of the poly(A) tails, as the mRNAs were converged to the A_0 position by oligo(dT)/ RNase H treatment (Supplementary Figure S1). From these results, we conclude that CPEB accelerates deadenylation and decay of c-myc mRNA. We note that these results are not due to a secondary or nonspecific effect of CPEB, as CPEB alone did not accelerate the decay of a reporter mRNA appended with MS2-binding sites in its 3′-UTR but without CPEs (Supplementary Figure S2). On the other hand, MS2-CPEB increased the rate of deadenylation and decay for the reporter mRNA (Supplementary Figure S2). These observations further confirm that CPEB promotes deadenylation and decay of c-myc mRNA through its binding to the 3′-UTR.

Caf1 is responsible for the CPEB-accelerated decay of c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA

Next, we sought to determine whether the CPEB-accelerated decay of c-myc 3′-UTR reporter mRNA was mediated by Caf1 deadenylase. For this purpose, we applied a dominant-negative

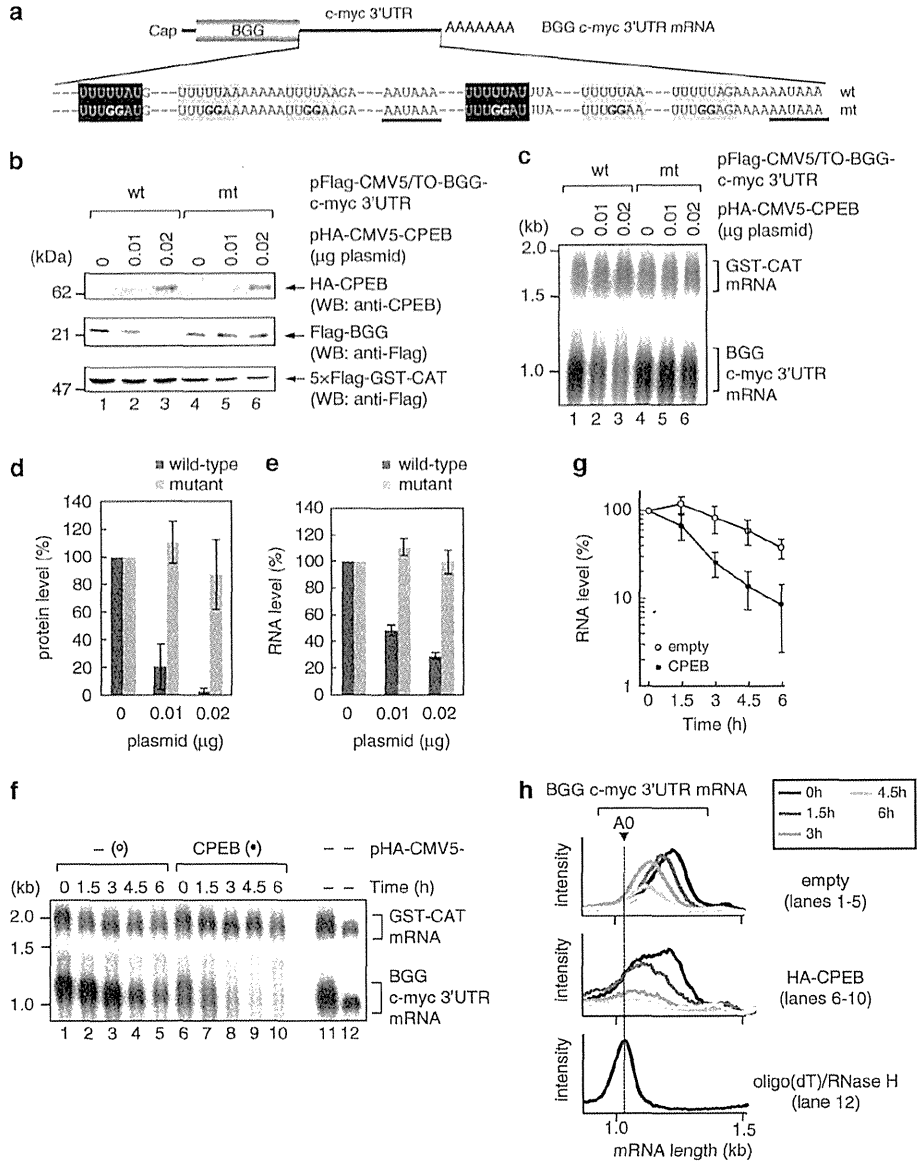

Figure 2. CPEB negatively regulates the expression of c-myc 3′-UTR reporter by promoting mRNA decay. (**a**) Schematic diagram of c-myc 3′-UTR reporter mRNA. Open reading frame of the BGG mRNA was appended with the human c-myc 3′-UTR, which contains two consensus CPEs (black box), four non-consensus CPEs (gray box) and two polyadenylation hexanucleotide sequences (black line). Bold letters designate nucleotides that were changed in the mutant reporter. (**b**) HeLa cells were transfected with increasing amounts of pHA-CMV5-CPEB, a reference plasmid pCMV-5 × Flag-GST-CAT, and either pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR (lanes 1–3) or pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR mutant (lanes 4–6). The cell extracts were subjected to western blotting (WB) with the indicated antibodies. 5 × Flag-GST-CAT served as a transfection/loading control. (**c**) HeLa cells were transfected as in (**b**). Total RNA was prepared from the cells and subjected to northern blotting. (**d**) The amount of BGG protein as in (**b**) was measured and normalized by GST-CAT protein. The score without pHA-CMV5-CPEB was defined as 100%. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**e**) The amount of BGG c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA as in (**c**) was measured and normalized by GST-CAT mRNA. The score without pHA-CMV5-CPEB was defined as 100%. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**f**) T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with the pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR reporter plasmid, a reference plasmid pCMV-5 × Flag-GST-CAT, and either pHA-CMV5 (lanes 1–5) or pHA-CMV5-CPEB (lanes 6–10). After 1 day, BGG mRNA was induced to express by treatment with tetracycline for 2 h, and cells were harvested at the specified time after the transcription was shut off. To analyze steady-state mRNAs, BGG mRNA was induced to express by treatment with tetracycline for 16 h (lane 11). The steady-state mRNAs were digested with *RNase*H in the presence of oligo (dT) to mark the deadenylated mRNAs (lane 12). (**g**) The level of BGG c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA as in (**f**) was quantified and normalized by the level of GST-CAT mRNA. The score from the 0 h time point was defined as 100%. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**h**) BGG c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA distribution was visualized by quantifying the signal intensity from northern blot in (**f**).

approach. T-REx HeLa cells were co-transfected with the c-myc 3′-UTR plasmid and a plasmid expressing CPEB, with or without a plasmid expressing a nuclease-deficient Caf1 mutant in which a catalytically essential aspartate residue was mutated to alanine (Caf1 D161A), and a transcriptional pulse-chase analysis was performed. The Caf1 mutant almost completely blocked CPEB-accelerated deadenylation and decay of the c-myc 3′-UTR reporter mRNA (Figures 3a and b). In contrast, a Pan2 mutant

(Pan2 D1083A) that had no deadenylase activity showed no apparent effect. The expression of comparable amounts of Caf1 D161A and Pan2 D1083A was confirmed by western blotting (Figure 3e).

In this relation, CPEB is known to bind another deadenylase PARN to regulate deadenylation of its target mRNA in the *Xenopus* oocyte.[8] The interaction was recapitulated between human-derived CPEB and PARN (Supplementary Figure S3). When lysate of HeLa cells expressing 5 × Flag-CPEB and 5 × Myc-PARN was immunoprecipitated with anti-Flag antibody, the precipitated fraction contained 5 × Myc-PARN. However, overexpression of a PARN mutant (PARN D28A) that had no deadenylase activity[29] showed no effect on CPEB-accelerated deadenylation and decay of the c-myc 3′-UTR reporter mRNA (data not shown). Collectively, these results indicate that CPEB-accelerated deadenylation and decay of the c-myc 3′-UTR reporter mRNA is dependent on the deadenylase activity of Caf1.

To confirm that Tob is involved in the CPEB-accelerated c-myc mRNA decay, small interfering RNA (siRNA)-mediated knockdown was performed. In this case, Tob and Tob2, a highly homologous paralogue of Tob, were depleted simultaneously (Figure 3f). As shown in Figures 3c and d, depletion of Tob/Tob2 significantly reduced the rate of mRNA decay of the c-myc 3′-UTR reporter.

Tob and CPEB negatively regulate endogenous c-myc expression at the mRNA level

We next examined if Tob as well as CPEB is actually involved in the regulation of endogenous c-myc mRNA. For this purpose, we used U2OS cells, as CPEB, Tob and Caf1. Proteins were all expressed in this cell line at a level sufficient for detection using our antibodies (Figure 4a). CPEB and Tob were depleted by siRNA-mediated knockdown, and the expression of c-myc was examined at both the mRNA and protein level. Depletion of Tob/Tob2 resulted in an

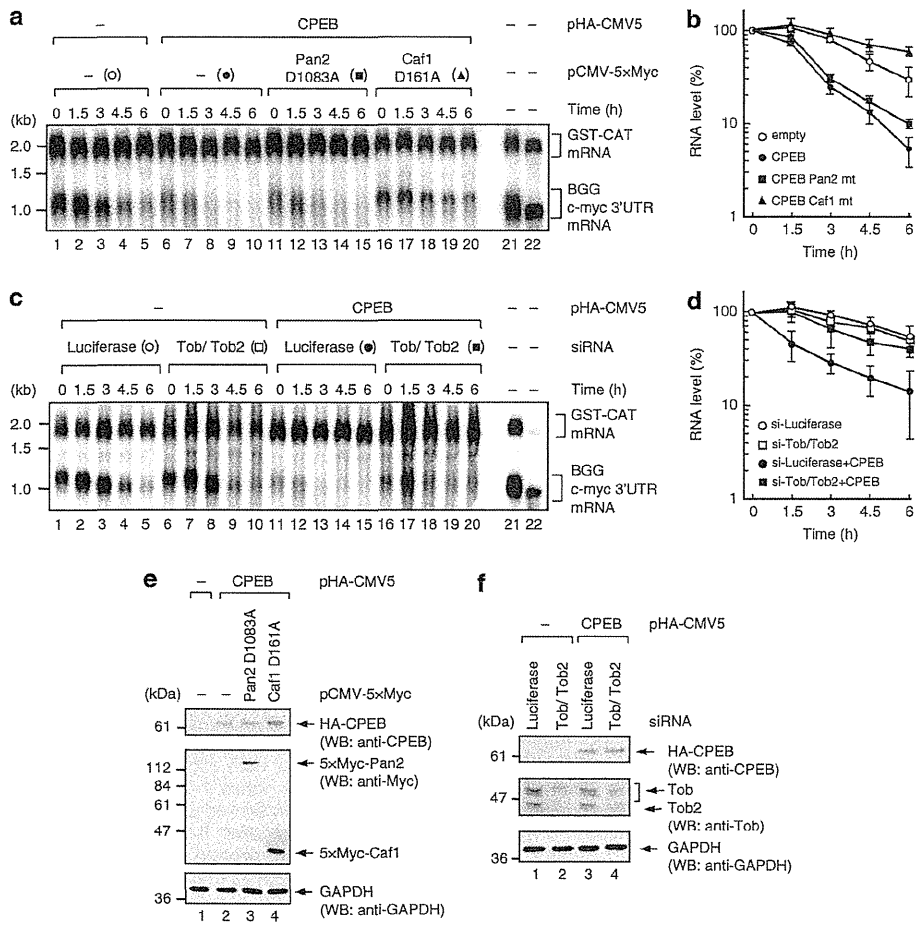

Figure 3. Tob–Caf1 complex is required for CPEB-mediated mRNA decay. (**a**) T-REx HeLa cells were transfected with the pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR reporter plasmid, pCMV-5 × Flag-GST-CAT reference plasmid, pHA-CMV5-CPEB (lanes 6–20), and either pCMV-5 × Myc-Pan2 D1083A (lanes 11–15) or pCMV-5 × Myc-Caf1 D161A (lanes 16–20). As a control, cells were transfected with pHA-CMV5 and pCMV-5 × Myc (lanes 1–5). After 1 day, BGG mRNA was induced to express by treatment with tetracycline for 2 h, and cells were harvested at the specified time after the transcription was shut off. BGG mRNA was induced to express by treatment with tetracycline for 12 h (steady state, lane 21), and digested with *RNase*H in the presence of oligo (dT) to mark the deadenylated mRNAs (lane 22). (**b**) The level of BGG c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA as in (**a**) was quantified and normalized by the level of GST-CAT mRNA. The score from the 0 h time point was defined as 100%. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**c**) HeLa cells were transfected with Tob/Tob2 or a control luciferase siRNA. At 48 h after siRNA transfection, cells were transfected with pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR reporter plasmid, pCMV-5 × Flag-GST-CAT reference plasmid, pcDNA-T7-TetR, and either pHA-CMV5-CPEB (lanes 11–20) or pHA-CMV5 (lanes 1–10). The transcriptional pulse-chase analysis was performed as described above. (**d**) The level of BGG c-myc 3′-UTR mRNA as in (**c**) was quantified and normalized by the level of GST-CAT mRNA. The score from the 0 h time point was defined as 100%. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**e**, **f**) Total cell lysate was analyzed by western blotting (WB) using indicated antibodies.

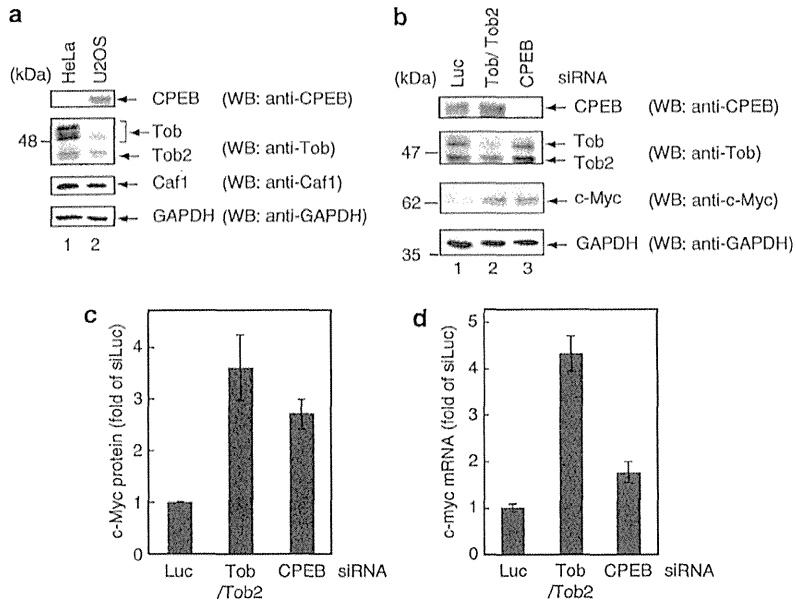

Figure 4. Downregulation of CPEB or Tob/Tob2 increases the levels of endogenous c-myc mRNA and protein in U2OS cells. (**a**) Whole cell lysate from U2OS or HeLa cells was analyzed by western blotting (WB) using the indicated antibodies. (**b**) U2OS cells were transfected with Tob/Tob2 siRNA, CPEB siRNA or a control luciferase siRNA. At 72 h after transfection, cells were harvested and total cell lysate was analyzed by WB using indicated antibodies. (**c**) The amount of c-Myc protein as in (**b**) was measured and normalized by GAPDH. The c-Myc protein level in luciferase siRNA-treated cells was set to 1 and fold-increases are indicated. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n=3$). (**d**) U2OS cells were transfected with Tob/Tob2 siRNA, CPEB siRNA or a control luciferase siRNA. At 72 h after transfection, total RNA was isolated and reverse-transcribed using random primer, and endogenous c-myc and GAPDH mRNA levels were analyzed by real-time PCR. The c-myc mRNA levels were normalized by GAPDH mRNA, and fold-increases are indicated with the c-myc mRNA level in luciferase siRNA-treated cells set to 1. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n=3$).

approximately three- to fourfold increase in c-myc expression at both levels (Figures 4b–d). Similar results were obtained for CPEB. c-myc expression at both the protein and mRNA level was increased by the depletion of CPEB, although relatively modestly (two- to threefold) (Figures 4b–d). These results indicate that CPEB and Tob form a ternary complex (CPEB–Tob–Caf1) and negatively regulate c-myc mRNA in cells.

Tob/Tob2 and CPEB negatively regulate the stability of endogenous c-myc mRNA in starved cells and the effects are abrogated by serum stimulation

It is well established that the level of c-myc mRNA depends upon the cellular growth state. In serum-starved cells, c-myc mRNA is expressed at a very low level. When cells are stimulated by serum, the abundance of c-myc mRNA starts to rise, and peaked within 1 and 2 h, followed by a decline and a plateau at several fold the levels in starved cells.[30] The transcription level reaches a peak before that of the c-myc mRNA level. As both Tob and CPEB regulate cell cycle progression, we examined whether these factors are involved in the serum-induced immediate-early response of c-myc gene expression (Figures 5b and c). To measure changes in the level of c-myc transcription and mRNA abundance at the same time, we performed a real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis using two pairs of PCR primers (Figure 5a) and reverse transcription (RT) products of total RNA prepared from U2OS cells as a template. The primer pair a–c amplifies c-myc mature mRNA (cytoplasmic mRNA), whereas primer pair b and c amplifies c-myc pre-mRNA (nuclear mRNA). The pre-mRNA level generally reflects transcription. It is important to note that even after 35 thermal cycles, no amplification was observed when mock RT products prepared without reverse transcriptase were used as a template, and that these primer pairs amplify only a single band (Supplementary Figure S4A and data not shown). As shown in SupplementaryFigure S4B, the c-myc transcription and mRNA abundance measured in this assay system faithfully recapitulated the fluctuations previously reported upon serum stimulation, further validating the specificity of the primer pairs. Similar to the results from the steady-state analysis in Figure 4, knockdown of either Tob/Tob2 or CPEB resulted in a marked increase in c-myc mature mRNA in starved cells (Figure 5b, mature mRNA, starved, $P<0.05$). However, the effect was attenuated at 1 h after serum stimulation (Figure 5b; mature mRNA, stimulated), suggesting that Tob/Tob2 and CPEB negatively regulate the level of c-myc mRNA under starved conditions and the effects are abrogated by serum stimulation. Analysis of pre-mRNA revealed that knockdown of Tob/Tob2 but not CPEB increased c-myc transcription slightly but significantly in starved condition (Figure 5b; pre-mRNA, $P<0.05$). This result explains why c-myc mRNA was more abundant in Tob/Tob2 knockdown cells than in CPEB knockdown cells (Figure 4d). Figure 5c shows the same result as in Figure 5b, but the *y* axis represents the fold-increase of c-myc mature or pre-mRNA in serum-stimulated cells relative to starved cells. In control siRNA-treated cells, c-myc mature mRNA was increased by ~7-fold (Figure 5c, Luc, 2nd column). Knockdown of either Tob/Tob2 or CPEB reduced c-myc mRNA induction by ~3-fold after serum stimulation (Figure 5c; Tob/Tob2, CPEB, 2nd column, $P<0.005$). In contrast, there were no significant differences in the induction of c-myc pre-mRNA among these cells (Figure 5c; Tob/Tob2, CPEB, 4th column). Consistent with fluctuations of c-myc mRNA, c-Myc protein was increased by knockdown of either Tob or CPEB in starved cells (Figures 5d and e). Also, serum-stimulated induction of c-Myc protein was inhibited by their knockdowns (Figures 5d and f). These results strengthen our conclusion that CPEB and Tob regulate the expression of c-Myc at the level of mRNA.

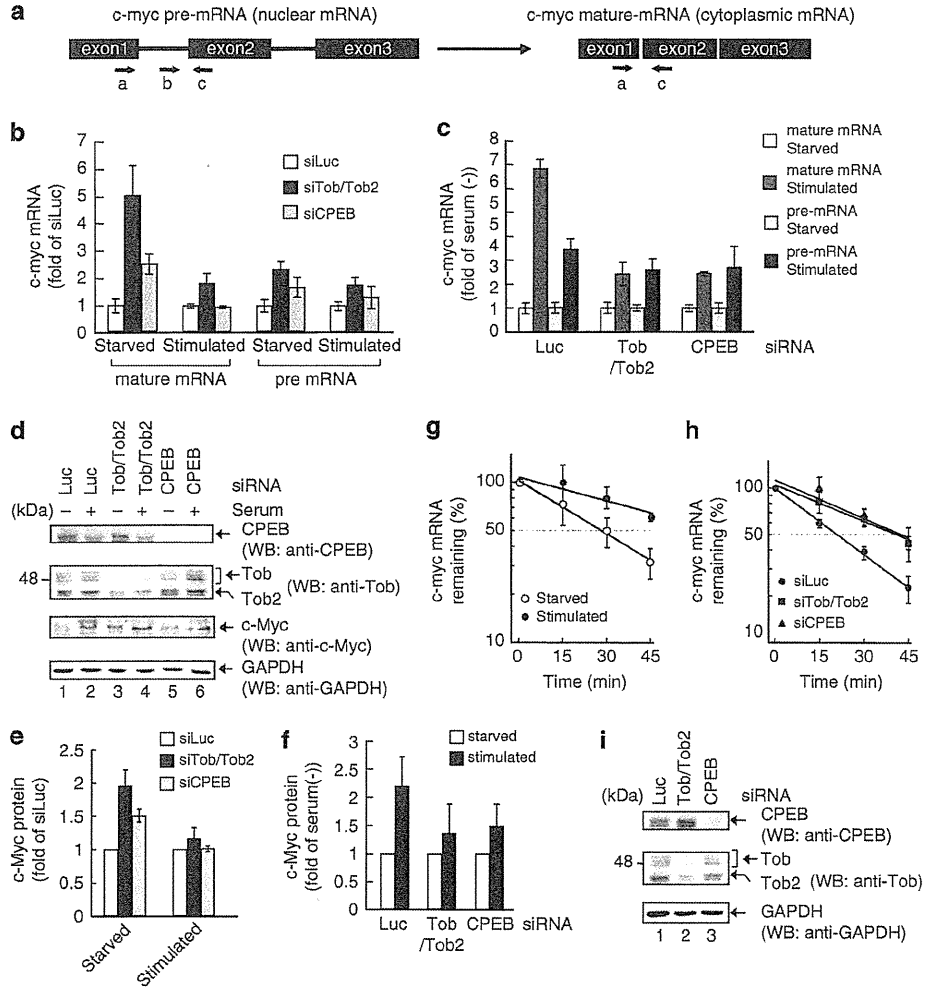

Figure 5. Tob/Tob2 and CPEB negatively regulate the stability of endogenous c-myc mRNA under starved conditions and the effects are abrogated by serum stimulation. (**a**) Diagram of c-myc mRNA and primers used for real-time PCR. Sense primers a and b correspond to sites within exon 1 and intron 1, respectively. Antisense primer c corresponds to exon 2. In this study, c-myc pre- and mature mRNA were amplified with primer pairs b–c and a–c, respectively. (**b**) U2OS cells were transfected with Tob/Tob2 siRNA, CPEB siRNA or a control luciferase siRNA. At 48 h after transfection, cells were washed and serum-starved for 24 h. Quiescent cells were stimulated with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) for 1 h, and total RNA was isolated and reverse-transcribed using random primer. Endogenous c-myc pre- and mature mRNA levels were analyzed by real-time PCR. The c-myc mRNA levels were normalized by GAPDH mRNA, and fold-increases are indicated with the c-myc mRNA level in luciferase siRNA-treated cells set to 1. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**c**) Data in (**b**) were analyzed and expressed with serum-starved samples set to 1. (**d**) U2OS cells were transfected with Tob/Tob2 siRNA, CPEB siRNA or a control luciferase siRNA. Total cell lysates were analyzed by western blotting (WB) using indicated antibodies. (**e**) The amount of c-Myc protein as in (**d**) was measured and normalized by GAPDH. The score in luciferase siRNA-treated cells was set to 1 and fold-increases are indicated. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**f**) Data in (**d**) were analyzed and expressed with serum-starved samples set to 1. (**g**) U2OS cells were washed and serum-starved for 24 h. Quiescent cells were pre-treated with 10 μg/ml actinomycin D for 15 min, and stimulated with 10% FBS or left untreated. Total RNA was isolated at the indicated times and reverse-transcribed using random primer. Endogenous c-myc mRNA levels (normalized by GAPDH mRNA) were analyzed by real-time PCR. The c-myc mRNA half-lives were 27.6 and 62.2 min in starved and stimulated cells, respectively. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**h**) U2OS cells were transfected with Tob/Tob2 siRNA, CPEB siRNA or a control luciferase siRNA. At 48 h after transfection, cells were washed and serum-starved for 24 h. Quiescent U2OS cells were treated with 10 μg/ml actinomycin D and 10% FBS. Total RNA was isolated and c-myc mRNA levels (normalized by GAPDH mRNA) were analyzed. The c-myc mRNA half-lives were 21.2, 38.8 and 37.0 min in control, Tob/Tob2 and CPEB knockdown cells, respectively. Data are the mean ± s.d. ($n = 3$). (**i**) Total cell lysate was analyzed by WB using indicated antibodies.

The above results led us to speculate that both Tob/Tob2 and CPEB are involved in the induction of c-myc mRNA expression after serum stimulation in a process of controlling mRNA stability. To investigate this possibility, we first examined if there are changes in c-myc mRNA stability after serum stimulation. Serum-starved U2OS cells were pre-treated with actinomycin D for 15 min, and then stimulated with serum or left untreated (starved). Actinomycin D was maintained in the medium throughout the time course. Total RNA was isolated every 15 min after serum was added and analyzed by real-time PCR. As shown in Figure 5g, the half-life of c-myc mRNA was about 2.3-fold longer in stimulated cells than starved cells. Thus, we next estimated the half-life of c-myc mRNA in serum-starved quiescent cells that were treated with siRNA against either Tob/Tob2 or CPEB (Figures 5h and i).

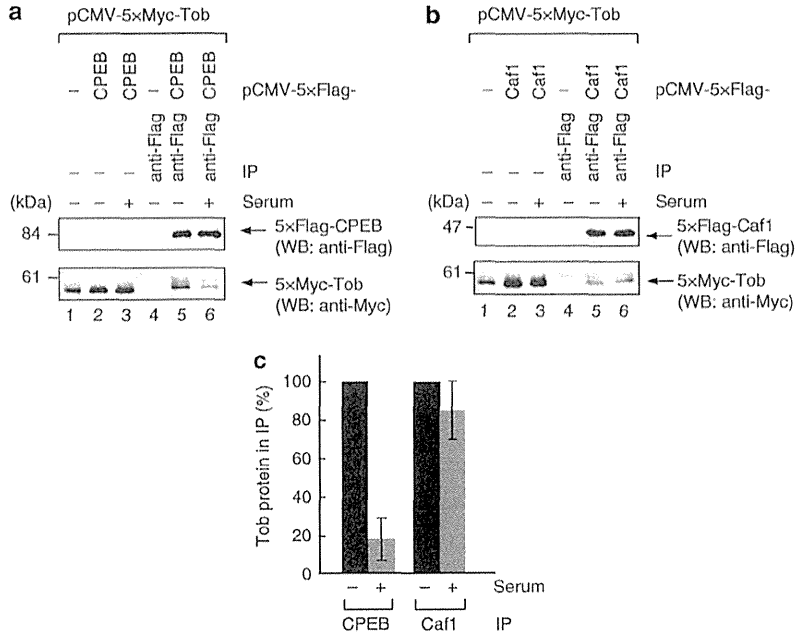

Figure 6. Serum stimulation induces dissociation of Tob and Caf1 from CPEB. (**a**) U2OS cells were transfected with pCMV-5 × Myc-Tob, and either pCMV-5 × Flag-CPEB or pCMV-5 × Flag. After 1 day, cells were washed and serum-starved for 24 h. The quiescent cells were stimulated with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) for 20 min and cell extracts were subjected to immunoprecipitation (IP) in the presence of *RNase*I using anti-Flag antibody. The immunoprecipitates (lanes 4–6) and inputs (lanes 1–3) were analyzed by western blotting with the indicated antibodies. (**b**) U2OS cells were transfected with pCMV-5 × Myc-Tob, and either pCMV-5 × Flag-Caf1 or pCMV-5 × Flag. After 1 day, cells were washed and serum-starved for 24 h. The quiescent cells were stimulated with 10% serum for 20 min and cell extracts were subjected to IP in the presence of *RNase*I using anti-Myc antibody. The immunoprecipitates (lanes 4–6) and inputs (lanes 1–3) were analyzed by western blotting with the indicated antibodies. (**c**) The amounts of the co-purified Tob proteins in the immunoprecipitates as in (**a**) and (**b**) were quantified and normalized by the amount of CPEB or Caf1 proteins immunoprecipitated. The score from serum-starved cells was defined as 100%. Data are the mean ± s.d ($n = 3$).

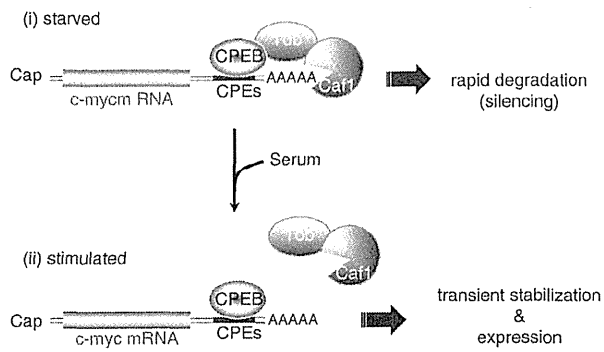

Figure 7. Proposed model for the serum-induced stabilization of c-myc mRNA. In serum-starved quiescent cells, CPEB bound to the *cis* elements (CPEs) in the c-myc mRNA 3′-UTR recruits the Tob–Caf1 complex to the mRNA to form a ternary complex, which leads to accelerated deadenylation and decay of the message. Upon serum stimulation, Tob and Caf1 transiently dissociate from CPEB and c-myc mRNA is stabilized and expressed as an 'immediate-early response gene'.

The half-life was extended in both Tob/Tob2 and CPEB knockdown cells by about twofold, near comparable to that in stimulated cells (2.3-fold as described above).

Tob and Caf1 dissociate from CPEB in response to serum stimulation

Finally, we performed co-immunoprecipitation experiments in serum-starved and -stimulated cells. When lysate of serum-starved U2OS cells expressing 5 × Flag-CPEB and 5 × Myc-Tob was immunoprecipitated with anti-Flag antibody, the precipitated fraction contained 5 × Myc-Tob as well as 5 × Flag-CPEB, whereas association of 5 × Myc-Tob with 5 × Flag-CPEB was drastically decreased after serum stimulation (Figures 6a and c, lanes 4–6, $P<0.005$). In contrast, when lysate of serum-starved U2OS cells expressing 5 × Flag-Caf1 and 5 × Myc-Tob was immunoprecipitated with anti-Flag antibody, 5 × Myc-Tob was co-precipitated with 5 × Flag-Caf1 irrespective of the presence or absence of the serum, indicating that the binding of Tob with Caf1 was not affected by the serum condition (Figures 6b and c, lanes 4–6).

Taken together, our observations demonstrate that CPEB accelerates deadenylation and decay of the c-myc mRNA by recruiting the Tob–Caf1 complex to c-myc mRNA in starved quiescent cells, and serum stimulation induces dissociation of the Tob–Caf1 complex from CPEB to stabilize c-myc mRNA.

DISCUSSION

Tob is a member of the BTG/Tob family of antiproliferative proteins, which regulates cell cycle progression in a variety of cell types. Previous study demonstrated that Tob is involved in the control of G1- to S-phase transition of the cell cycle.[22,23] On the other hand, we and others have demonstrated that Tob functions in deadenylation of both general[16,17] and specific[19] mRNAs. However, the role of Tob in mRNA deadenylation with respect to cell growth regulation has remained to be determined.

This study provides evidence that Tob mediates deadenylation of c-myc mRNA and negatively regulates its expression. In serum-starved quiescent state, Tob mediates recruitment of Caf1 deadenylase to the CPEB-bound c-myc mRNA and accelerates deadenylation and decay of the mRNA. While in cells stimulated

by serum, Tob in a complex with Caf1 dissociates from CPEB-bound c-myc mRNA, which leads to a transient stabilization of the message and immediate-early expression of c-Myc (Figure 7). Thus, Tob appears to function in the control of cell growth at least, in part, by regulating the expression of c-myc.

It has been reported that CPEB activates translation of CPE-containing mRNAs (for example, αCAMKII and p53) by promoting cytoplasmic polyadenylation of the messages.[31,32] In contrast, no CPE-containing mRNA that is subject to accelerated deadenylation by CPEB has been reported in mammalian somatic cells. To our knowledge, c-myc is the first example of such an mRNA. Therefore, it was surprising that tethering CPEB to mRNA 3′-UTR led to accelerated deadenylation and decay of the mRNA (Supplementary Figure S2), which is reminiscent of c-myc, but neither αCAMK2 nor p53. Moreover, reporter mRNAs appended with other CPEB-target 3′-UTR, such as c-jun 3′-UTR,[33] were not affected by overexpression of CPEB (data not shown). Thus, CPEB does not necessarily induce polyadenylation (or deadenylation) of CPE-containing mRNAs by default. It remains unknown what determines whether CPEB-bound mRNAs will be degraded by accelerated deadenylation or translationally activated by cytoplasmic polyadenylation. In *Xenopus* oocytes, not every CPE-containing mRNA is translationally activated at the same time during meiosis after progesterone treatment. The positional distribution and the number of CPE sequences, as well as the arrangement of other *cis*-acting elements, such as AU-rich element,[34] Musashi-binding element,[35] Pumilio-binding element[36] and translational control sequence,[37] around CPEs define the extent and timing of translational activation.[38] Moreover, translational repression by CPEB requires a cluster of at least two CPEs with an optimal distance of 10–12 nucleotides.[36] This finding implies that the recruitment of the translational repressor maskin is mediated by a CPEB dimer formed on two adjacent CPEs. It is possible that such factors are involved in the determination of the fate of CPE-containing mRNAs in mammalian somatic cells. We are currently investigating this possibility.

c-Myc is a basic helix–loop–helix leucine zipper transcription factor and is required for the activation of cyclin D-dependent kinases and G0/G1- to S-phase transition.[39] Numerous studies have documented that the c-myc oncogene is expressed immediately after growth stimulation of quiescent cells and is essential for the regulation of cell growth. In most cases, changes measured in the rate of c-myc gene transcription are insufficient to account for the fluctuations and even no significant change in the rate of transcription was detectable in some cells.[30,40,41] These results suggest that the changes in c-myc expression during G0/G1- to S-phase transition are controlled by a post-transcriptional mechanism. However, this mechanism has remained to be determined for over 20 years. The results presented here provide one answer to this long-standing question.

Activation of c-myc gene expression after mitogenic stimulation is mediated by the Ras/Raf/mitogen-activated protein kinase pathway.[42] In this relation, previous study demonstrated that Tob is phosphorylated at serine residues by mitogen-activated protein kinase (Erk1/Erk2) downstream of the Ras signaling pathway.[22,23] These results led us to speculate that serum activates Ras-mitogen-activated protein kinase signaling pathways and the Erk-mediated phosphorylation of the serine residues of Tob is responsible for the dissociation of Tob from CPEB and stabilization of c-myc mRNA. However, mutant Tob with either serine-to-alanine or serine-to-glutamate mutations at the Erk phosphorylation sites (Ser 152, 154 and 164) bound CPEB with similar affinity to wild-type Tob and still showed dissociation from CPEB upon serum stimulation (data not shown). Previous study demonstrated that Tob is phosphorylated at at least three serine/threonine residues other than Ser 152, 154 and 164 upon mitogenic stimulation.[23] Thus, phosphorylation of residues other than the three serine residues or other modifications of Tob and/or CPEB seem to be responsible for the dissociation of the complex.

In addition to Tob and c-Myc, CPEB and Caf1 are also known to be involved in cell cycle regulation. (i) siRNA-mediated knockdown of CPEB results in an increase in astrocytic cell proliferation, whereas overexpression of CPEB inhibits it.[43] On the other hand, similar CPEB knockdown shows proliferation defects in HeLa cells.[44] (ii) siRNA-mediated knockdown of Caf1 leads to a defect in both G1- to S-phase transition and cell proliferation,[45] while overexpression of Caf1 also inhibits cell proliferation.[46] Thus, as in the case for Tob, Caf1 and CPEB also inhibit cell proliferation when overexpressed in cells, but the phenotypes resulting from siRNA-mediated knockdowns are divergent depending on cell types and on each component. Since CPEB also regulates cytoplasmic polyadenylation of cell cycle regulators (for example, CDKN3, Mnt, STXBP2, and so on) and Caf1 regulates transcription and deadenylation of general mRNAs, the effect on proliferation resulting from the modulation of these components might not be unidirectional.

Previous studies have shown that CPEB promotes polyadenylation-induced translational activation of cyclin B1 mRNA in the M phase and maskin-mediated translational repression in the S phase of early mitotic cell divisions in *Xenopus* embryos.[47] In contrast to the early embryonic divisions without intervening G1 and G2 phases, CPEB also regulates G2- to M-phase transition of mitotically dividing cells by mediating cytoplasmic polyadenylation of specific mRNAs, including CDKN3 and Cdc20.[44] In this study, we have shown that CPEB-mediated deadenylation and decay of c-myc mRNA might also be important for the regulation of G0/G1- to S-phase transition of the cell cycle. Remaining questions that we are currently pursuing are whether CPEB promotes cytoplasmic polyadenylation not only in the M phase but also during G0/G1- to S-phase transition and whether c-myc mRNA is polyadenylated in response to serum stimulation in a CPEB-dependent manner. These will be the subjects of forthcoming papers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plasmids

To construct pHA-CMV5-CPEB, pCMV-5 × Myc-CPEB, pCMV-5 × Flag-CPEB, pMAL-cRI-CPEB and pGEX6P1-CPEB, the full-length open reading frame was PCR-amplified using the primers: sense, 5′-TTTCAATTGATG GCGTTCCCGCTGGAA-3′ and antisense, 5′-TTTGTCGACCTAGCTGGAA TCTCGGTTC-3′, and CPEB1 cDNA (IMAGE i.d. no. 6047179; Thermo Fischer Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) as a template. The resulting DNA was digested with *Mun*I and *Sal*I and inserted into *Eco*RI and *Sal*I sites of pHA-CMV5, pCMV-5 × Myc, pCMV-5 × Flag, pMAL-cRI (New England Biolaboratories, Ipswich, MA, USA) and pGEX6P1 (GE Healthcare, Waukesha, WI, USA), respectively. To generate pCMV-5 × Myc-Tob, pME-Myc-Tob[19] was digested with *Eco*RI, and Tob cDNA fragment was inserted into the *Eco*RI site of pCMV-5 × Myc. To construct pCMV-5 × Myc-PARN, full-length PARN open reading frame was PCR-amplified using the primers: sense, 5′-A AGGTCGACATGGAGATAATCAGGAGC-3′ and antisense, 5′-AGAGTCGA CTTACCATGTGTCAGGAAC3′, and HeLa oligo(dT)-primed RT products. The resulting fragments were digested with *Sal*I and inserted into pCMV-5 × Myc. To construct pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR, pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG(*Hind*III) was generated by introducing a *Hind*III site into the stop codon of pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG using the primers: 5′-CTTGCTTTCTTG CTGTCCAATTTC-3′ and 5′-CTTAGTGATACTTGTGGGCCAGGG-3′. c-myc 3′-UTR was PCR-amplified using: sense, 5′-GAAAGCTTGTTCTAGAGG AAAAGTAAGGAA-3′ and antisense, 5′-GACGGTAGGATCCAGCTGGCTGCA GGTGAG-3′, and HeLa genomic DNA as a template. The resulting DNA was digested with *Hind*III and *Pst*I and inserted into pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG(*Hind*III). To generate pFlag-CMV5/TO-BGG c-myc 3′-UTR CPE mt, the 3′, middle and 5′ segments of c-myc 3′-UTR were PCR-amplified using the following primer pairs: sense, 5′-GAAAGCTTGTTCTAGAGGAAAAGTAA GGAA-3′ and antisense, 5′-GTAAGCATCCAAAAGTTCTTTTATGCCCAA-3′; sense, 5′-AAGAACTTTTGGATGCTTACCATCTTTTTT-3′ and antisense, 5′-ACTT AAATCCAAAAAATTAGGGTTTATAGT-3′; and sense, 5′-CTAATTTTTTGGATT TAAGTACATTTTGCT-3′ and antisense, 5′-GACGGTAGGATCCAGCTGGC