Energetics of HF Elimination and N–F Bond Cleavage in Some Difluoramines and Gem-Nitro/Difluoramines

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Energetics of HF Elimination and N-F Bond Cleavage in Some Difluoramines and Gem-Nitro/Difluoramines

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We have shown, through density functional calculations (Becke exchange/Lee, Yang and Parr correlation functionals, 6-31G** basis set) that the elimination of HF from H₃C-NF₂ is thermodynamically favored, ΔG(298.15 K) = -29 kcal/mole, but has a relatively high activation barrier, ΔG⁺(298.15 K) = 38 kcal/mole. The N–F dissociation energy, ΔE₅₋₆, is found to be 69 kcal/mole. Introduction of a nitro group, giving H₂C(NO₂)NF₂, produces only small changes in these values: ΔG(298.15 K) = -28 kcal/mole; ΔG⁺(298.15 K) = 36 kcal/mole; ΔE₅₋₆ = 66 kcal/mole. Replacement of all alpha hydrogens by methyl groups increases the N–F dissociation energies slightly (<2 kcal/mole). These substituent effects are interpreted in terms of geminal interactions.
Introduction

There is a continuing interest in the difluoramino group, \(-\text{NF}_2\), as a potentially important substituent in energetic systems, particularly propellants [1-6]. As is discussed elsewhere, replacing some \(-\text{NO}_2\) groups by \(-\text{NF}_2\) can increase the number of moles of gaseous combustion products formed per gram of material [5, 7], thereby enhancing propellant performance [5, 8]. A number of mixed nitro/difluoramino derivatives have been synthesized [2, 3, 9], including compounds in which the two groups are on the same carbon, \textit{gem}-nitro/difluaramines [10].

A source of concern when a difluoramine contains an \textit{alpha} hydrogen is instability with respect to loss of HF [11, 12]:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{H} \quad \text{F} \\
\text{R}_2\text{C} - \text{N} - \text{F} \\
\end{array} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{R}_2\text{C} = \text{N} - \text{F} + \text{HF}
\end{array}
\]  

(1)

An analogous possibility exists in the case of hypofluorites [13-15], in which fluorine is also bonded to a highly electronegative atom, in this case oxygen:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{H} \quad \text{F} \\
\text{R}_2\text{C} - \text{O} \\
\end{array} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{R}_2\text{C} = \text{O} + \text{HF}
\end{array}
\]  

(2)

Indeed reaction (2) is apparently more likely than (1), which requires a catalyst [11, 12]. However \(\text{H}_3\text{C}-\text{OF}\) has been isolated and characterized [13-15], and its unimolecular decomposition to \(\text{H}_2\text{C}=\text{O}\) and HF has been subjected to a detailed computational analysis [16]. The two most favorable (and possibly competing) pathways were found to be (a) a single-step HF elimination through a four-centered transition state, and (b) a two-step process involving an initial, and rate-determining, cleavage of the O–F bond. While the overall reaction,

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{H}_3\text{C} - \text{OF} \\
\end{array} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{H}_2\text{C}=\text{O} + \text{HF}
\end{array}
\]  

(3)

was predicted to have a strong thermodynamic driving force, \(\Delta E = -73.9\) kcal/mole at the correlated \textit{ab initio} G2 level [16], the relatively high free energies of activation (>36 kcal/mole at 300 K) obtained for both of the pathways described above indicate an unexpected level of kinetic stability for \(\text{H}_3\text{C}-\text{OF}\), as has indeed been observed [13].

Our present objective is to examine various aspects of the elimination of HF from \(\text{H}_3\text{C}-\text{NF}_2\), and how this is affected by the presence of \text{NO}_2 on the same carbon. In order to have a more complete picture of the factors influencing the stabilities of difluaramines and \textit{gem}-nitro/difluaramines, our analysis also includes molecules in which there is no \textit{alpha} hydrogen, i.e. \((\text{H}_3\text{C})_3\text{C}-\text{NF}_2\) and \((\text{H}_3\text{C})_2\text{C}(\text{NO}_2)\text{NF}_2\).
Methods

Optimized geometries, energies, vibrational frequencies and entropies for all systems of interest were computed with the GAUSSIAN 94 program [17]. A nonlocal density functional procedure was used, involving the Becke exchange [18] and Lee, Yang and Parr correlation [19] functionals, and a 6-31G** basis set. The calculated vibrational frequencies provided verification that all computed geometries correspond either to true energy minima or to transition states, as desired [20]. All energetic data to be given in this paper include zero-point corrections.

Results and Discussion

Reaction energetics

The loss of HF from either H$_3$C-NF$_2$ or H$_2$C(NO$_2$)NF$_2$ is found to be thermodynamically favored:

$$\begin{align*}
H_3C-NF_2 &\rightarrow H_2C=NF + HF \\
\Delta E (0 \text{ K}) &= -20.1 \text{ kcal/mole} \\
\Delta G (298.15 \text{ K}) &= -28.9 \text{ kcal/mole}
\end{align*}$$

As pointed out earlier, the \textit{ab initio} G2 $\Delta E$ for the elimination of HF from H$_3$C-OF is much larger in magnitude, $-73.9$ kcal/mole [16].

Guided by the results of the H$_3$C-OF study, we have examined two possible decomposition mechanisms for H$_3$C-NF$_2$ and H$_2$C(NO$_2$)NF$_2$; the first is one in which they pass through a four-centered transition state and then proceed to lose HF, eqs. (6) and (7),

$$\begin{align*}
H_3C-NF_2 &\rightarrow H_2C=NF + HF \\
\Delta E^\ddagger (0 \text{ K}) &= 38.0 \text{ kcal/mole} \\
\Delta G^\ddagger (298.15 \text{ K}) &= 37.9 \text{ kcal/mole}
\end{align*}$$
while the second begins with the homolytic cleavage of an N–F bond, eqs. (8) and (9).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{H}_3\text{C}–\text{NF}_2 & \rightarrow \text{H}_3\text{C}–\text{NF} + \text{F} \\
\Delta E (0 \text{ K}) & = 69.3 \text{ kcal/mole} \\
\Delta G (298.15 \text{ K}) & = 60.6 \text{ kcal/mole}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{H}_2\text{C}–\text{NF}_2 & \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{C}–\text{NF} + \text{F} \\
\Delta E (0 \text{ K}) & = 65.7 \text{ kcal/mole} \\
\Delta G (298.15 \text{ K}) & = 56.4 \text{ kcal/mole}
\end{align*}
\]

It is clear that breaking an N–F bond requires more energy, or free energy, than formation of the four-centered transition state; thus the latter is the favored pathway for elimination of HF from either H₃C–NF₂ or H₂C(NO₂)NF₂. This conclusion is in contrast to that reached for H₃C–OF [16], in which case the two pathways are competitive in terms of their free energy requirements. The calculated free energies of activation for forming the four-centered transition states are actually quite similar for all three molecules, between 35 and 39 kcal/mole; however the computed O–F bond dissociation energy is considerably less (45.9 kcal/mole [16]) than the N–F in either H₃C–NF₂ or H₂C(NO₂)NF₂, and the inclusion of TAS makes O–F bond-breaking a viable alternative to formation of the transition state. Our values for the N–F dissociation energies, 69.3 and 65.7 kcal/mole, are in very good agreement with other calculated and relevant experimental data [10, 21].

While the presence of the strongly electron-withdrawing –NO₂ group might be expected to significantly affect the energetics of processes related to the elimination of HF, we find only a relatively small lowering (<4 kcal/mole) of the energy requirements for either the four-centered transition state or cleavage of an N–F bond. We also examined the consequences of eliminating all

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{H}_2\text{C}–\text{NF}_2 & \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{C}–\text{NF} + \text{F} \\
\Delta E (0 \text{ K}) & = 69.3 \text{ kcal/mole} \\
\Delta G (298.15 \text{ K}) & = 60.6 \text{ kcal/mole}
\end{align*}
\]
alpha hydrogens and introducing a carbon chain. The N–F dissociation energy is found to increase slightly (< 2 kcal/mole), eqs. (10) and (11):

\[(H_3C)_3C—NF_2 \rightarrow (H_3C)_3C—NF + F\]  \\
\[\Delta E (0 K) = 71.2 \text{ kcal/mole}\]  \\

(10)

\[(H_3C)_2C—NF_2 \rightarrow (H_3C)_2C—NF + F\]  \\
\[\Delta E (0 K) = 66.8 \text{ kcal/mole}\]  \\

(11)

Substituent interactions

It is known that two functional groups attached to the same atom can have either a stabilizing or destabilizing interaction, the so-called "geminal effect" [20, 22]. If both groups are overall electron-withdrawing, as are –NO\(_2\) [23] and –NF\(_2\) [7, 24], then destabilization is anticipated [22]. A commonly used procedure for quantifying this is by means of an appropriate isodesmic reaction [20]. This is a hypothetical chemical process in which the number of bonds of each formal type remains the same but their mutual relationships are changed. The value of \(\Delta E\) for such a reaction reveals any deviations from bond energy additivity, and is interpreted as reflecting any special energetic effects. Thus, the positive \(\Delta E\) that we obtain for eq. (12) confirms that the interaction between –NO\(_2\) and –NF\(_2\), when substituted on the same carbon, is indeed destabilizing:

\[\begin{align*}
H_3C—NO_2 & + H_3C—NF_2 \rightarrow H_2C—NF_2 + CH_4 \\
\Delta E (0 K) & = 3.5 \text{ kcal}
\end{align*}\]  \\

(12)

However this is countered by the presence of methyl groups:

\[\begin{align*}
(H_3C)_2CH & + H_3C—NF_2 \rightarrow (H_3C)_2C—NF_2 + CH_4 \\
\Delta E (0 K) & = -1.2 \text{ kcal}
\end{align*}\]  \\

(13)

\[\begin{align*}
(H_3C)_2CH & + H_3C—NO_2 \rightarrow (H_3C)_2C—NO_2 + CH_4 \\
\Delta E (0 K) & = -1.2 \text{ kcal}
\end{align*}\]  \\

(14)
\[ \Delta E (0 \text{ K}) = -1.7 \text{ kcal} \]

\[ H_3C-CH-NF_2 + C_2H_6 \longrightarrow (H_3C)_2C-NF_2 + CH_4 \quad (15) \]

\[ \Delta E (0 \text{ K}) = -6.8 \text{ kcal} \]

Stabilization is also observed for just the methyl/difluoramino combination:

\[ \text{NF}_2 \]

\[ (H_3C)_2CH + C_2H_6 \longrightarrow (H_3C)_3C-NF_2 + CH_4 \quad (16) \]

\[ \Delta E (0 \text{ K}) = -4.1 \text{ kcal} \]

\[ (H_3C)_2CH + H_3C-NF_2 \longrightarrow (H_3C)_3C-NF_2 + CH_4 \quad (17) \]

\[ \Delta E (0 \text{ K}) = -9.1 \text{ kcal} \]

It was pointed out above that the nitro group slightly lowers the energy requirement for N–F bond cleavage, while the methyl does the opposite. It seems reasonable to suggest that these effects may reflect the destabilizing interaction between geminal difluoramino and nitro groups, and the stabilizing influence of the methyl.

Conclusions
The major points to come out of this work are the following:

(1) The loss of HF from H$_3$C–NF$_2$ is believed to proceed through a four-centered transition state, not via initial rupture of an N–F bond. The activation barrier is relatively high, about 38 kcal/mole. This provides a degree of kinetic stability, even though the elimination of HF is thermodynamically favored: \( \Delta G (298.15 \text{ K}) = -29 \text{ kcal/mole} \).

(2) The above conclusions are only slightly affected by the additional presence of the nitro group on the substituted carbon, H$_2$C(NO$_2$)NF$_2$. The activation barrier is reduced by less than 3 kcal/mole, and the overall \( \Delta G (298.15 \text{ K}) \) is \(-28 \text{ kcal/mole} \). There is also little change in the N–F dissociation energy, \( \Delta E (0 \text{ K}) \), which decreases from 69 kcal/mole for H$_3$C–NF$_2$ to 66 kcal/mole for H$_2$C(NO$_2$)NF$_2$. 
(3) When all alpha hydrogens are replaced by methyl groups, these N–F dissociation energies increase very slightly (< 2 kcal/mole).

(4) There is a weakly destabilizing interaction between −NF₂ and −NO₂ when on the same carbon, and a weakly stabilizing one between −NF₂ and −CH₃. These help to explain the effects, noted above, of nitro and methyl substituents.

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