Brucella periplasmic protein EipB is a molecular determinant of cell envelope integrity and virulence

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Summary

The Gram-negative cell envelope is a remarkable structure with core components that include an inner membrane, an outer membrane, and a peptidoglycan layer in the periplasmic space between. Multiple molecular systems function to maintain integrity of this essential barrier between the interior of the cell and its surrounding environment. We show that a conserved DUF1849-family protein, EipB, is secreted to the periplasmic space of *Brucella*, a monophyletic group of intracellular pathogens. In the periplasm, EipB folds into an unusual fourteen-stranded β-spiral structure that resembles the LolA and LolB lipoprotein delivery system, though the overall fold of EipB is distinct from LolA/LolB. Deletion of *eipB* results in defects in *Brucella* cell envelope integrity *in vitro* and in maintenance of spleen colonization in a mouse model of *B. abortus* infection. Transposon disruption of *ttpA*, which encodes a periplasmic protein containing tetratricopeptide repeats, is synthetically lethal with *eipB* deletion. *ttpA* is a reported virulence determinant in *Brucella*, and our studies of *ttpA* deletion and overexpression strains provide evidence that this gene also contributes to cell envelope function. We conclude that *eipB* and *ttpA* function in the *Brucella* periplasmic space to maintain cell envelope integrity, which facilitates survival in a mammalian host.

Importance

Brucella species cause brucellosis, a global zoonosis. A gene encoding a conserved DUF1849-family protein, which we have named EipB, is present in all sequenced *Brucella* and several other genera in the class *Alphaproteobacteria.* This manuscript provides the first functional and structural characterization of a DUF1849 protein. We show that EipB is

55 secreted to the periplasm where it forms a spiral-shaped antiparallel-β protein that is a
56 determinant of cell envelope integrity *in vitro* and virulence in an animal model of disease.
57 *eipB* genetically interacts with *ttpA*, which also encodes a periplasmic protein. We propose
58 that EipB and TtpA function as part of a system required for cell envelope homeostasis in
59 select *Alphaproteobacteria*.
60

61 ## Introduction

62 *Brucella* spp. are the causative agents of brucellosis, which afflicts wildlife and livestock on
63 a global scale and can occur in humans through contact with infected animals or animal
64 products (1, 2). These intracellular pathogens are members of the class
65 *Alphaproteobacteria*, a group of Gram-negative species that exhibit tremendous diversity
66 in metabolic capacity, cell morphology, and ecological niches (3). In their mammalian
67 hosts, *Brucella* cells must contend with the host immune system (4) and adapt to stresses
68 including oxidative assault from immune cells, acidic pH in the phagosomal compartment,
69 and nutrient shifts during intracellular trafficking (5). Molecular components of the cell
70 envelope play a key role in the ability of *Brucella* spp. to survive these stresses and to
71 replicate in the intracellular niche (6, 7). As part of a systematic experimental survey of
72 conserved *Alphaproteobacterial* protein **d**omains of **u**nknown **f**unction (DUFs), we recently
73 described **e**nvelope **i**ntegrity **p**rotein **A** (EipA). This periplasmic protein confers resistance
74 to cell envelope stressors and determines *B. abortus* virulence in a mouse model of
75 infection (8). In this study, we report a functional and structural analysis of **e**nvelope
76 **i**ntegrity **p**rotein **B** (EipB), a member of the uncharacterized gene family DUF1849.
77

DUF1849 (Pfam: PF08904, (9)) is widespread among the *Rhizobiales*, *Rhodospirillales* and *Rhodobacterales* (Figure 1). To our knowledge, no functional data have been reported for this gene family other than results from a recent multi-species Tn-seq study that showed stress sensitivity in *Sinorhizobium meliloti* DUF1849 (locus *SMc02102*) mutant strains (10). Here we show that the *Brucella* DUF1849 protein, EipB (locus tag *bab1_1186*; RefSeq locus BAB_RS21600), is a 280-residue periplasmic protein that folds into a 14-stranded, open β-barrel structure containing a conserved disulfide bond. We term this novel barrel structure a β-spiral and show that it resembles the lipoprotein chaperone LolB, though its overall fold is distinct. Replication and survival of a *B. abortus* strain in which we deleted *eipB* was attenuated in a mouse infection model, and deletion of *eipB* in both *B. abortus* and *Brucella ovis* enhanced sensitivity to compounds that affect the integrity of the cell envelope. We have further shown that *B. abortus eipB* deletion is synthetically lethal with transposon disruption of gene locus *bab1_0430*, which encodes a periplasmic **t**etra**t**ricopeptide-repeat (TPR) containing-**p**rotein that we have named TtpA. The *Brucella melitensis* ortholog of TtpA (locus tag BMEI1531) has been previously described as a molecular determinant of mouse spleen colonization (11), while a *Rhizobium leguminosarum* TtpA homolog (locus tag RL0936) is required for proper cell envelope function (12). We propose that TtpA and EipB coordinately function in the *Brucella* periplasm to ensure cell envelope integrity and to enable cell survival in the mammalian host niche.

Results

B. abortus eipB is required for maintenance of mouse spleen colonization

As part of a screen to evaluate the role of conserved *Alphaproteobacterial* genes of unknown function in *B. abortus* infection biology, we infected THP-1 macrophage-like cells with wild-type *B. abortus*, an *eipB* deletion strain (Δ*eipB*), and a genetically complemented Δ*eipB* strain. Infected macrophages were lysed and colony forming units (CFU) were enumerated on tryptic soy agar plates (TSA) at 1, 24 and 48 hours post-infection. We observed no significant differences between strains at 1, 24 or 48 hours post-infection, indicating that *eipB* was not required for entry, replication or intracellular survival *in vitro* (Figure 2A).

We further evaluated the role of *eipB* in a BALB/c mouse infection model. Mice infected with Δ*eipB* had no significant difference in spleen weight or bacterial load compared to mice infected with wild-type *B. abortus* strain 2308 at one-week post-infection (Figure 2B). However, at 4- and 8-weeks post-infection, mice infected with the wild-type or the complemented *eipB* deletion strains had pronounced splenomegaly and a bacterial load of approximately 5 x 10^6 CFU/spleen. In contrast, mice infected with Δ*eipB* had smaller spleens with approximately 2 orders fewer bacteria (~1 x 10^4 CFU/spleen) (Figure 2B). We conclude that *eipB* is not required for initial spleen colonization but is necessary for full virulence and persistence in the spleen over an 8-week time course.

To assess the pathology of mice infected with wild-type and Δ*eipB* strains, we harvested spleens at 8 weeks post-infection and fixed, mounted, and subjected the samples to hematoxylin and eosin (H&E) staining (Figure S1). Compared to naïve (uninfected) mice (Figure S1A), we observed higher extramedullary hematopoiesis, histiocytic proliferation, granulomas, and the presence of *Brucella* immunoreactivities in spleens of mice infected

125 with wild-type *B. abortus* 2308 and the genetically-complemented mutant strain (Figure
126 S1B and D). Both wild-type and the complemented strain caused spleen inflammation with
127 a reduced white to red pulp ratio as a result of lymphoid follicle disruption and red pulp
128 expansion, which typically correlates with infiltration of inflammatory cells; these spleens
129 also had increased marginal zones (Figure S1B and D). As expected from the CFU
130 enumeration data, mice infected with Δ*eipB* had reduced pathologic features: there was
131 minimal change in white to red pulp ratio, and a minimal increase in marginal zones
132 (Figure S1C). There was no evidence of extramedullary hematopoiesis in mice infected
133 with Δ*eipB*, though histiocytic proliferation was mildly increased. Granulomas and *Brucella*
134 immunoreactivities were rare in Δ*eipB* (Figure S1C). These results are consistent with a
135 model in which *eipB* is required for full *B. abortus* virulence in a mouse model of infection.
136 A summary of spleen pathology scores is presented in Table S1.
137
138 We further measured antibody responses in mice infected with Δ*eipB* and wild-type strains.
139 Serum levels of total IgG, *Brucella*-specific IgG, subclass IgG1, and subclass IgG2a were
140 measured by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISA) (Figure 2C-F). Antibody
141 subclasses IgG2a and IgG1 were measured as markers of T helper 1 (Th1)- and Th2-
142 specific immune responses, respectively. At 8 weeks post-infection, total serum IgG was
143 higher in all infected mice relative to the uninfected control (Figure 2C). The level of
144 *Brucella*-specific IgG was approximately 5 times higher in Δ*eipB*-infected mice than in mice
145 infected with wild-type or the complemented mutant strain (Figure 2D). Uninfected mice
146 and mice infected with wild-type, Δ*eipB* and the Δ*eipB*-complemented strain showed no
147 significant difference in IgG1 levels after 8 weeks (Figure 2E). All infected mice had highly
148 increased levels of IgG2a at 8 weeks post infection relative to naïve mice, though there

149 was no difference between *B. abortus* strains (Figure 2F). We conclude that Δ*eipB*
150 infection results in production of more *B. abortus*-specific antibodies than wild-type.
151 Subclasses IgG1 and IgG2a do not apparently account for the higher levels of these
152 specific antibodies. Large induction of IgG2a by all *B. abortus* strains is consistent with the
153 known ability of *B. abortus* to promote a strong Th1 response (13, 14). However, Δ*eipB*
154 does not induce a more robust Th1 response than wild-type based on our IgG2a
155 measurements. We did not test whether antibodies contribute to clearance of the Δ*eipB*
156 strain. Enhanced *Brucella*-specific antibody production may simply be a consequence of
157 antigen release triggered by host clearance of Δ*eipB* by other immune mechanisms.
158
159 **The Δ*eipB* strain is sensitive to cell envelope stressors**
160 To test whether reduced virulence of Δ*eipB* correlates with an increased sensitivity to
161 stress *in vitro*, we evaluated *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* growth on TSA plates supplemented with
162 known cell membrane/envelope stressors including EDTA, ampicillin and deoxycholate.
163 Δ*eipB* had 1.5 to 3 orders fewer CFUs compared to wild-type when titered on TSA plates
164 containing these compounds. All phenotypes were complemented by restoring the Δ*eipB*
165 locus to wild-type (Figure 3A). Together, these data provide evidence that *eipB* contributes
166 to resistance to compounds that compromise the integrity of the *B. abortus* cell
167 membrane/envelope.
168
169 Although Δ*eipB* CFUs were reduced relative to wild-type on agar plates containing all three
170 envelope stressors that we assayed, we observed no apparent defects in Δ*eipB* cell
171 morphology by light microscopy or cryo-electron microscopy when cultivated in liquid broth
172 (Figure 3B and C). Incubation of Δ*eipB* with 2 mM EDTA or 5 µg/ml ampicillin (final

concentration) in Brucella broth for 4 hours also had no apparent effect on cell structure, nor did *eipB* overexpression (Figure 3B and C). Longer periods of growth in the presence of stressors may be required for differences in cell morphology/structure to be evident in broth. It may also be the case that the envelope stress phenotypes we observe are particular to growth on solid medium.

B. abortus Δ*eipB* agglutination phenotypes indicate the presence of smooth LPS

In *B. abortus*, smooth LPS (containing O-polysaccharide) is an important virulence determinant (15). Smooth LPS can also act as a protective layer against treatments that compromise the integrity of the cell envelope (16). Loss of smooth LPS in *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* could therefore explain the phenotypes we observe for this strain. To test this hypothesis, we assayed wild-type and Δ*eipB* agglutination in the presence of serum from a *B. abortus*-infected mouse. A major serological response to smooth *Brucella* species is to O-polysaccharide (17), and thus agglutination can provide an indirect indication of the presence or absence of smooth LPS on the surface of the cell. Both wild-type and Δ*eipB* strains agglutinated in the presence of serum from a *B. abortus*-infected mouse, providing evidence for the presence of O-polysaccharide in Δ*eipB* (Figure S2A). As a negative control, we incubated the naturally rough species *B. ovis* with the same serum; *B. ovis* did not agglutinate in the presence of this serum (Figure S2A). We further assayed agglutination of *B. abortus* wild-type and Δ*eipB* strains in the presence of acriflavine, which is demonstrated to agglutinate rough strains such as *B. ovis* (18, 19). After 2 hours of incubation, we observed no agglutination of wild-type *B. abortus* or Δ*eipB* (Figure S2B). We treated *B. ovis* with acriflavine as a positive control and observed agglutination as expected (Figure S2B). Together, these data indicate that deletion of *eipB* does not result

in a loss of smooth LPS. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the chemical structure of O-polysaccharide is altered in Δ*eipB*.

EipB is a monomeric protein that is secreted to the periplasm

The N-terminus (residues M1-A30) of *Brucella* EipB contains a predicted signal peptide based on SignalP 4.2 analysis (20). EipB (DUF1849) homologs in other *Alphaproteobacteria* also have a predicted N-terminal secretion signal (Figure S3). We note that EipB in our wild-type *B. abortus* 2308 strain has a methionine instead of a leucine at position 250. These two amino acids are interchangeable at this position in DUF1849 (Figure S4). To test the prediction that EipB is a periplasmic protein, we fused the *Escherichia coli* periplasmic alkaline phosphatase gene (*phoA*) to *B. abortus eipB* and expressed fusions from a *lac* promoter in *B. ovis*. We generated (i) the full-length EipB protein (M1-K280) fused at its C-terminus to *E. coli* PhoA (EipB-$PhoA_{Ec}$) and (ii) an EipB-PhoA fusion lacking the hypothetical EipB signal peptide sequence ($EipB^{S29\text{-}K280}$-$PhoA_{Ec}$). After overnight growth in Brucella broth in presence or absence of 1 mM isopropyl β-D-1-thiogalactopyranoside (IPTG), we adjusted each culture to the same density and loaded into a 96-well plate containing 5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate (BCIP, final concentration 200 µg/ml). BCIP is hydrolyzed to a blue pigment by PhoA, which can be measured colorimetrically. BCIP diffusion through the inner membrane is inefficient, and thus this reagent can be used to specifically detect PhoA activity in the periplasmic space or in the extracellular medium (21). After a 2-hour incubation at 37°C, the well containing the *B. ovis* cells expressing the $EipB^{M1\text{-}K280}$-$PhoA_{Ec}$ fusion turned dark blue. We observed no color change in the well containing the *B. ovis* strain expressing the $EipB^{S29\text{-}K280}$-$PhoA_{Ec}$ protein fusion (Figure 4A). As expected, no color change was observed in absence of

induction with 1 mM IPTG (Figure 4A). To test if EipB is secreted from the cell into the growth medium, we performed a similar experiment on spent medium supernatants from the different cultures. We observed no color change in these samples after 2 hours of incubation providing evidence that EipB$^{M1\text{-}K280}$-PhoA$_{Ec}$ is not secreted from the cell.

We further assayed the oligomeric state of affinity-purified *B. abortus* EipB in solution by size-exclusion chromatography. The calculated molecular mass of His$_6$-EipB (V31-K280) is 30.7 kDa. This protein eluted from a sizing column at a volume with an apparent molecular mass of ~23 kDa, which is consistent with a monomer (Figure 4B). There was no evidence of larger oligomers by size-exclusion chromatography. From these data, we conclude that EipB is a monomeric periplasmic protein.

EipB folds into a spiral-like β-sheet that resembles PA1994, LolA and LolB

We postulated that the three-dimensional structure of EipB may provide molecular-level insight into its function in the cell. As such, we solved an x-ray crystal structure of *B. abortus* EipB (residues A30-K280; PDB ID: 6NTR). EipB lacking its signal peptide formed triclinic crystals (a=47.4 Å b=69.2 Å, c=83.2 Å, α=90.1, β=90.0°, γ=78.7°) that diffracted to 2.1 Å resolution; we refined this structure to R_{work}= 0.195 and R_{free}= 0.245. Crystallographic data and refinement statistics are summarized in Table S2. Four EipB molecules (chains A-D) are present in the crystallographic asymmetric unit.

Each EipB monomer consists of 14 antiparallel β-strands (β1-β14) forming an oval, spiral-like β-sheet (minor axis diameter: ~25 Å; major axis diameter: ~35 Å). Two regions of this β-spiral, involving β5, β6, β7, β8 and the hairpin loop connecting β9 and β10, overlap

(Figure 5A and B). Interactions between these two overlapping portions of structure are mostly hydrophobic, though polar contacts are also found in these regions (Figures 5 and 6). One side of the spiral is occluded by the N-terminus, a loop connecting β-strands 12 and 13, and α-helix 1, which form the bottom of this "cup" shaped protein (Figures 5 and 6A). The external surface of EipB is positively and negatively charged, and also presents small hydrophobic patches (Figure S5); one helix, α2, is kinked and positioned at the surface of the cylindrical β-spiral (Figure 5A and B). The lumen of EipB is solvent accessible and is partially filled with the side chains of hydrophobic or acidic residues. Hydrophobic residues represent ~66% of the residues present inside the EipB cavity (Figures 5 and 6B). The size of this cavity suggests that EipB, in this conformation, can accommodate small molecules or ligands in its lumen.

We searched the EipB structure against the protein structure database using Dali (22), but failed to identify clear structural homologs. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* PA1994 (PDB ID: 2H1T) (23) was the closest structural match to EipB (RMSD ~3.5; Z-score ~11) (Figure S6A). Despite very low sequence identity (~8%), PA1994 has noticeable structural similarities to EipB: it adopts a spiral-like β-fold involving 15 β-strands, which is occluded at one end with a long α-helix. Unlike EipB, PA1994 lacks a signal peptide and is predicted to be a cytoplasmic protein. Structural parallels between PA1994 and the periplasmic lipoprotein chaperones LolA/LolB have been noted and a role for PA1994 in glycolipid metabolism has been postulated (23), though this prediction remains untested. Like PA1994, EipB has structural similarities to LolA and LolB, in particular the antiparallel and curved β-sheet scaffold that engulfs a central α-helical plug (Figure S6B). Whether

Brucella EipB, or DUF1849 proteins more generally, function in trafficking lipoproteins or other molecules in the periplasm remains to be tested.

EipB has a conserved disulfide bond

We identified two cysteines in EipB, C69 and C278, which are the two most conserved residues in the DUF1849 sequence family (Figures S3 and S4). C69 is solvent exposed in *Brucella* EipB and positioned in a loop connecting β2 and β3. C278 is present at the C-terminus of the protein, which immediately follows β14. β14 interacts with β13 and β1, and is spatially proximal to β2 and β3 (Figure 7A). Given the proximity of these two cysteines in the EipB structure, we hypothesized that C69 and C278 form an internal disulfide bond. However, electron density for the 10 C-terminal residues (containing C278) is not well resolved in the EipB crystal structure, and a disulfide bond is not evident, likely because the protein was dialyzed against a buffer containing 2 mM 1,4-dithiothreitol (DTT) prior to crystallization.

To biochemically test if these two cysteines form a disulfide bond, we purified *B. abortus* EipB under non-reducing conditions and mixed the protein with SDS gel loading dye with or without 1 mM dithithreitol (DTT). We observed two bands that migrated differently in the 30 kDa region when the protein was resolved by 12% SDS-PAGE. EipB without DTT migrated farther than the DTT-treated protein, suggesting the presence of a disulfide bond (Figure 7B). We performed this same experiment with three different EipB cysteine mutant proteins in which C69, C278, or both were mutated to serine. In the absence of DTT, $EipB^{C69S}$ and $EipB^{C278S}$ migrated at an apparent molecular weight of ~60 kDa, corresponding to a dimeric EipB interacting through a S-S bond. After DTT treatment,

these mutant proteins migrated the same as the reduced wild-type protein (Figure 7B). As expected, the double cysteine mutant (EipB$^{C69S+C278S}$) did not form an apparent dimer and was unaffected by DTT (Figure 7B). From these data, we conclude that an internal disulfide bond can form between C69 and C278 in EipB and is likely present *in vivo*, as EipB resides in the oxidizing environment of the periplasm.

To test whether this disulfide bond affects EipB function, we measured CFUs of a *Brucella ovis* Δ*eipB* (Δ*bov_1121*) strain expressing wild-type *B. abortus* EipB or cysteine disulfide mutants on agar plates containing 3 µg/ml carbenicillin. *B. ovis* is a closely related biosafety level 2 (BSL2) surrogate for *B. abortus*. *B. ovis* and *B. abortus* EipB are identical with the exception of one amino acid at position 250 (Figure S4). In this carbenicillin assay (Figure 7C and D), *B. abortus* EipB complemented a *B. ovis* Δ*eipB* strain, suggesting that the substitution at residue 250 does not impair EipB function. We placed four different versions of *eipB* under the control of a *lac* promoter (P_{lac}): P_{lac}-*eipB*^{WT}, P_{lac}-*eipB*^{C69S}, P_{lac}-*eipB*^{C278S}, and P_{lac}-*eipB*$^{C69S+C278S}$; the empty vector was used as a control. After 5 to 6 days of growth on Schaedler Blood Agar (SBA) plates containing 3 µg/ml of carbenicillin and no IPTG, we observed poor growth at only the lowest dilution for wild-type and Δ*eipB* strains carrying the empty vector control (also see Figure S7A for an example of growth on 2 µg/ml carbenicillin plates). Corresponding colonies for the strains carrying the different P_{lac}-*eipB* overexpression plasmids were more abundant though very small in the absence of IPTG induction. However, the strain harboring the wild-type *eipB* plasmid systematically grew at 1 log higher dilution than the cysteine mutant strains indicating that the presence of the disulfide bond in *eipB* contributes to carbenicillin resistance on solid medium (Figure 7C and D, see also Figure S7A). These results indicate some level of leaky expression

316 from the multi-copy P_{lac}-*eipB* plasmids. When induced with IPTG, overexpression of the
317 different EipB variants enhanced growth in all strains. (Figure 7C and D). As expected,
318 strains grown on control plates without carbenicillin had no growth defect, with or without
319 IPTG induction (Figure 7D). The morphology of *B. ovis* Δ***eipB*** strains expressing the
320 different variants of *eipB* appeared normal by phase contrast microscopy (see Figure
321 S7B). These results provide evidence that EipB is necessary for full carbenicillin resistance
322 in *B. ovis*, and that cysteines 69 and 278 contribute to EipB function *in vivo*.
323
324 To evaluate the effect of these two cysteines on EipB stability *in vitro*, we measured the
325 thermal stability of purified wild-type *B. abortus* EipB ($EipB^{WT}$) and double cysteine mutant
326 ($EipB^{C69S+C278S}$) in presence or absence of 2 mM DTT. $EipB^{WT}$ melted at ~46°C in absence
327 of DTT and at ~41.5°C in presence of DTT. $EipB^{C69S+C278S}$ melted at ~42.3°C in the
328 presence or absence of DTT (see Figure S8). We conclude that an internal disulfide bond
329 stabilizes EipB structure *in vitro*. Reduced stability of EipB lacking its conserved disulfide
330 bond may contribute to the 1 log relative growth defect of Δ*eipB* strains expressing EipB
331 cysteine mutants on SBA carbenicillin plates (Figure 7C and D).
332
333 **_eipB_ deletion is synthetically lethal with _bab1_0430_ (_ttpA_) disruption, and**
334 **synthetically sick with disruption of multiple genes with cell envelope functions**
335 To further characterize how *eipB* functions in the *Brucella* cell, we aimed to identify
336 transposon (Tn) insertion mutations that are synthetically lethal with *eipB* deletion in *B.*
337 *abortus* (see Tables S3 and S4). In other words, we sought to discover genes that are
338 dispensable in a wild-type genetic background, but that cannot be disrupted in a Δ*eipB*
339 background. By sequencing a Tn-Himar insertion library generated in *B. abortus* Δ***eipB***

(NCBI Sequence Read Archive accession SRR8322167) and a Tn-Himar library generated in wild-type *B. abortus* (NCBI Sequence Read Archive accession SRR7943723), we uncovered evidence that disruption of *bab1_0430* (RefSeq locus BAB_RS17965) is synthetically lethal with *eipB* deletion. Specifically, reproducible reads corresponding to insertions in the central 10-90% of *bab1_0430* were not evident in Δ*eipB*, but were present in wild-type (Figure 8A). *bab1_0430* encodes a 621-residue **t**etratrico**p**eptide **r**epeat-containing (TPR) protein with a predicted signal peptide and signal peptidase site at its N-terminus. This protein was previously detected by mass spectrometry analyses of *B. abortus* extracts, and described as a cell-envelope associated (24), or periplasmic protein (25). Hereafter, we refer to this gene as *ttpA* (**t**etra**t**ricopeptide repeat **p**rotein **A**) based on its similarity to *Rhizobium leguminosarum ttpA* (12).

Genes involved in LPS O-antigen synthesis, and previously described as synthetic lethal with *eipA* (*bab1_1612*) deletion in *B. abortus* (8), were synthetic sick with *eipB* deletion (Figure 8A), as were genes involved in peptidoglycan synthesis: *mltA* (*bab1_2076*, lytic murein transglycosylase A) and *bab1_0607* (glycosyl transferase/penicillin-binding protein 1A) (26) (Figure 8A). There were reduced transposon insertions in solute binding protein *yejA1* (*bab1_0010*) (Figure 8A), which is involved in *B. melitensis* resistance to polymyxin (27). *lnt* (*bab1_2158*) and *vtlR* (*bab1_1517*) were also synthetic sick with Δ*eipB*. *lnt* is an apolipoprotein N-acyltransferase involved in lipoprotein synthesis (28); *vtlR* encodes a LysR transcriptional regulator required for full *B. abortus* virulence (29) (Figure 8A). Finally, the general stress sensor kinase *lovHK* (*bab2_0652*) (30), *bab1_1293* (homoserine dehydrogenase), and *bab1_0188* (methionine synthase), had fewer Tn insertions in the Δ*eipB* background relative to wild-type (Figure 8A).

364

365 ***ttpA contributes to carbenicillin resistance***

366 As *ttpA* disruption is synthetic lethal with *eipB* deletion, we postulated that these two genes
367 have complementary functions or are involved in a common physiological process (i.e.
368 envelope integrity). Thus, to characterize *ttpA* and the nature of its connection to *eipB*, we
369 deleted *ttpA* in *B. ovis* and evaluated its sensitivity to carbenicillin. All efforts to delete *B.*
370 *ovis ttpA* (locus tag *bov_0411*) using a classic crossover recombination and *sacB*
371 counterselection approach were unsuccessful, though hundreds of clones were screened.
372 Efforts to delete the chromosomal copy by expressing a copy of *ttpA* from a plasmid also
373 failed. This result is surprising considering that transposon insertions in *B. abortus ttpA*
374 (NCBI Sequence Read Archive accession SRR7943723) and *B. ovis ttpA* (NCBI Sequence
375 Read Archive accession SRR7943724) are tolerated in wild-type backgrounds (8). As an
376 alternative approach to study the function of this gene, we inactivated *ttpA* using a single
377 crossover recombination strategy. The resulting strain expressed a truncated version of
378 TtpA containing the first 205 amino acids (including the signal peptide), immediately
379 followed by 22 amino acids form the suicide plasmid. The corresponding *B. ovis* strain
380 (Δ*ttpA*) was then transformed with a plasmid-borne IPTG-inducible copy of *ttpA* (pSRK-
381 *ttpA*) or with an empty plasmid vector (EV). We evaluated sensitivity of these strains to
382 carbenicillin by plating a dilution series on SBA plates containing 2 or 2.5 µg/ml
383 carbenicillin, with or without IPTG inducer (Figure 8B and C). When compared to wild-type
384 with empty vector, *B. ovis* Δ*ttpA* with empty vector had ~0.5 log reduced CFUs on
385 carbenicillin SBA. The corresponding colonies of *B. ovis* Δ*ttpA* were noticeably smaller
386 than wild-type. Genetic complementation of Δ*ttpA* with pSRK-*ttpA* restored growth on
387 carbenicillin plates. *B. ovis* Δ*ttpA*/pSRK-*ttpA* had ~1.5 log more colonies than wild-type in

388 the presence of carbenicillin, with or without IPTG induction. Thus, leaky expression of *ttpA*
389 from the *lac* promoter on pSRK-*ttpA* is apparently sufficient to protect this strain from
390 carbenicillin on solid medium. Morphology of the *B. ovis* Δ*ttpA* strains appeared normal by
391 phase contrast microscopy at 630x magnification (Figure S9).
392
393 To further evaluate the effect of *ttpA* overexpression, we assayed *B. ovis* wild-type and
394 Δ*eipB* strains carrying pSRK-*ttpA*. As before, we tested sensitivity of these inducible
395 expression strains to carbenicillin by plating a dilution series on SBA plates containing 3
396 µg/ml of carbenicillin, with or without 2 mM IPTG inducer (Figure 9A and B). Wild-type *B.*
397 *ovis*/pSRK-*ttpA* and wild-type *B. ovis*/pSRK-*eipB* strains had equivalent CFUs in the
398 absence of carbenicillin, with or without IPTG. *ttpA* or *eipB* provided a ~3 log protective
399 effect without IPTG induction in the presence of carbenicillin compared to the wild-type
400 empty vector strain (Figure 9). Surprisingly, inducing *ttpA* expression with IPTG reduced its
401 ability to protect in the presence of carbenicillin by 1 log (relative to uninduced), and the
402 corresponding colonies were very small suggesting slower growth when *ttpA* was induced
403 (Figure 9A and B). This may be an effect of IPTG, based on reduced CFU counts of wild-
404 type empty vector control under this condition. As expected, induced expression of *eipB*
405 from P_{lac}-*eipB* rescued the carbenicillin viability defect of Δ*eipB*. However, induced
406 expression of *ttpA* from P_{lac}-*ttpA* was not sufficient to rescue the Δ*eipB* carbenicillin
407 phenotype (Figure 9A and B). As before, we observed highly reduced CFUs for *B. ovis*
408 wild-type or Δ*eipB* control strains carrying the pSRK empty vector (EV), when challenged
409 with 3 µg/ml of carbenicillin. Morphology of wild-type or Δ*eipB B. ovis* strains
410 overexpressing *ttpA* appeared normal by phase contrast microscopy at 630x magnification
411 (Figure S10).

The observed genetic interaction between *eipB* and *ttpA*, the fact that both single mutants have envelope phenotypes, and the fact that both gene products are secreted to the periplasm raised the possibility that EipB and TtpA physically interact. We tested interaction between EipB and TtpA proteins using bacterial two-hybrid and biochemical pull-down assays. We further evaluated whether a possible EipB-TtpA interaction is influenced by the presence or absence of the EipB internal disulfide bond using a biochemical pull-down. For our bacterial two-hybrid assay, $EipB^{V31-K280}$ was fused to the T25 adenylate cyclase fragment, and $TtpA^{K31-D621}$ was fused to the T18 or T18C adenylate cyclase fragments. For the pull-down assay, MBP-tagged TtpA (K31-D621) and His-tagged EipB (V31-K280; wild-type and the different cysteine mutants) were co-purified in presence or absence of DTT. We found no evidence for direct interaction between EipB and TtpA, suggesting that the function of these two proteins in *Brucella* envelope stress adaptation is not achieved through direct interaction (Figure S11).

DISCUSSION

Bacterial genome sequencing efforts over the past two decades have revealed thousands of protein domains of unknown function (DUFs). The DUF1849 sequence family is prevalent in orders *Rhizobiales*, *Rhodobacterales* and *Rhodospirillales*. To date, the function of DUF1849 has remained undefined. We have shown that a DUF1849 gene in *Brucella* spp., which we have named *eipB*, encodes a 14-stranded β-spiral protein that is secreted to the periplasm. *eipB* is required for maintenance of *B. abortus* spleen colonization in a mouse model of infection (Figure 2), and *eipB* deletion in *B. abortus* and in *B. ovis* results in sensitivity to treatments that compromise the integrity of the cell

envelope *in vitro* (Figure 3). Envelope stress sensitivity of the *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* mutant likely contributes to its reduced virulence in a mouse. We further demonstrate that EipB contains a conserved disulfide bond that contributes to protein stability and function *in vitro*; the importance of this conserved disulfide to EipB function *in vivo* remains to be determined (Figures 6, 7, S3 and S4)

A lipoprotein connection?

An x-ray crystal structure of EipB shows that this periplasmic protein adopts an unusual β-spiral fold that shares structural similarity (DALI Z-score= 11.0) with a functionally-uncharacterized *P. aeruginosa* protein, PA1994, despite low sequence identity (Figure S6). It was previously noted (23) that PA1994 has structural features that resemble the lipoprotein carrier and chaperone proteins LolA and LolB, which have a central role in lipoprotein localization in select Gram-negative bacteria (31). Like LolA, LolB, and PA1994, *Brucella* EipB forms a curved hydrophobic β-sheet that is wrapped around an α-helix (Figure S6B). Homologs of LolA are present in *Brucella* and other *Alphaproteobacteria*, but homologs of LolB are missing (28). Given the EipB structure, its periplasmic localization, and the phenotypes of a Δ*eipB* deletion strain, it is tempting to speculate that EipB (DUF1849) has a LolB-like function in the *Brucella* cell. However, it seems unlikely that LolB and EipB function in a structurally- or biochemically-equivalent manner. Certainly, we observe surface-level similarity between LolA/LolB and EipB structures (Figure S6), particularly in the antiparallel β-sheet region, but these proteins have topological differences that distinguish their folds. Moreover, LolB is a membrane anchored lipoprotein that facilitates lipoprotein targeting at the inner leaflet of the outer membrane. In contrast,

459 *Brucella* EipB does not have a predicted site for lipidation (i.e. a lipobox), and is therefore
460 unlikely to function as a membrane-anchored protein.
461
462 The number of unique barcoded Tn-Himar insertions in the apolipoprotein N-
463 acyltransferase *lnt* (*bab1_2158*; *lnt* conserved domain database score < e^{-173}) is lower than
464 expected in a Δ*eipB* background relative to wild-type (Figure 8A). This provides indirect
465 evidence for a link between *eipB* and lipoproteins. Lnt catalyzes the final acylation step in
466 lipoprotein biogenesis (32), which is often considered to be an essential cellular process.
467 However, like *Francisella tularensis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (33), *B. abortus lnt* is
468 dispensable (26) (Figure 8A and Table S4). The data presented here suggest that
469 transposon insertions are less tolerated in *B. abortus lnt* when *eipB* is missing. Additional
470 experimentation is required to test a possible functional relationship between *lnt* and *eipB*.
471 However, it is notable that we did not observe a synthetic genetic interaction between *lnt*
472 and the gene encoding a structurally-unrelated periplasmic envelope integrity protein,
473 EipA, in a parallel Tn-seq experiment (8). Whether *eipB* actually influences lipoprotein
474 biogenesis or localization remains to be tested.
475
476 *TtpA: a periplasmic determinant of cell envelope function in Rhizobiaceae*
477 Transposon disruption of *ttpA* (*bab1_0430*) is not tolerated when *eipB* is deleted in *B.*
478 *abortus*. *ttpA,* like *eipB*, contributes to carbenicillin resistance *in vitro* (Figures 8 and 9).
479 Though we observed a genetic interaction between *eipB* and *ttpA*, we found no evidence
480 for a direct physical interaction between the two periplasmic proteins encoded by these
481 genes (Figure S11). TtpA is named for its tetratricopeptide repeat (TPR) motif; proteins
482 containing TPR motifs are known to function in many different pathways in bacteria

including cell envelope biogenesis, and are often molecular determinants of virulence (34, 35). Indeed, deletion of *ttpA* has been reported to attenuate *B. melitentis* virulence in a mouse infection model of infection (11) and to increase *R. leguminosarum* membrane permeability and sensitivity to SDS and hydrophobic antibiotics (12). A genetic interaction between *ttpA* and the **c**omplex **m**edia growth **d**eficient (*cmdA-cmdD*) operon has been reported in *R. leguminosarum*. Mutations in this operon result in envelope dysfunction and defects in cell morphology (12, 36). While *B. abortus* contains a predicted *cmd* operon (*bab1_1573, bab1_1574, bab1_1575, and bab1_1576*) these genes remain uncharacterized. We found no evidence for a synthetic genetic interaction between *eipB* and *cmd* in *B. abortus*.

Leaky expression of either *eipB* or *ttpA* from a plasmid strongly protected *B. ovis* from a cell wall antibiotic (carbenicillin). Surprisingly, inducing *ttpA* expression from a plasmid with IPTG did not protect as well as uninduced (i.e. leaky) *ttpA* expression (Figure 9A and B). IPTG induction of *eipB* expression from a plasmid did not have this same parabolic effect on cell growth/survival in the face of carbenicillin treatment. Considering that EipB and TtpA confer resistance to β-lactam antibiotics, which perturb peptidoglycan synthesis, one might hypothesize that these proteins influence the structure or synthesis of the cell wall. This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that a lytic murein transglycosylase and a class A PBP/glycosyl transferase are synthetic sick with *eipB* deletion (Figure 8A). In *E. coli*, the TPR-containing protein LpoA is proposed to reach from the outer membrane through the periplasm to interact with the peptidoglycan synthase PBP1A (37). Models in which EipB and TtpA influence lipoprotein biosynthesis and/or cell wall metabolism are important to

test as we work toward understanding the mechanisms by which these genes ensure *Brucella* cell envelope integrity and survival in a mammalian host.

Materials and Methods

Agglutination assays, mouse and macrophage infection assays, antibody measurements, and the transposon sequencing experiments for this study were performed in parallel with our recent studies of *eipA* (8).

All experiments using live *B. abortus* 2308 were performed in Biosafety Level 3 facilities according to United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) select agent regulations at the University of Chicago Howard Taylor Ricketts Laboratory. All the *B. abortus* and *B. ovis* strains were cultivated at 37°C with 5% CO_2; primer and strain information are available in Table S5.

Chromosomal deletions in *B. abortus* and in *B. ovis*

The *B. abortus and B. ovis* Δ*eipB* deletion strains were generated using a double crossover recombination strategy as previously described (8). Briefly, fragments corresponding to the 500-base pair region upstream of the *eipB* start codon and the 500-base pair region downstream of the *eipB* stop codon were ligated into the suicide plasmid pNPTS138, which carries the *nptI* gene for initial kanamycin selection and the *sacB* gene for counter-selection on sucrose. Genetic complementation of the *B. abortus* deletion strain was carried out by transforming this strain with a pNPTS138 plasmid carrying the

529 wild-type allele. The *B. ovis* Δ*eipB* strain was complemented with the pSRK-*eipB* plasmid
530 (IPTG inducible).
531
532 To inactivate *ttpA* in *B. ovis* (*bov_0411*), a 527-nucleotide long internal fragment was
533 cloned into pNPTS138-*cam* (a suicide plasmid that we engineered to carry a
534 chloramphenicol resistance marker) and used to disrupt the target gene by single
535 crossover insertion. The recombinant clones were selected on SBA plates supplemented
536 with 3 µg/ml chloramphenicol. The corresponding strain expresses the first 205 amino
537 acids (including the signal peptide) of TtpA, plus 22 extra amino acids from the plasmid
538 sequence, followed by a stop codon. This Δ*ttpA* strain was complemented with pSRK-*ttpA*
539 (kanamycin resistant).
540
541 ***Brucella* EipB and TtpA overexpression strains**
542 For ectopic expression of *B. ovis* TtpA and the different versions of *B. abortus* EipB (wild-
543 type, cysteine mutants, and the EipB-PhoA$_{Ec}$ fusion with or without the signal peptide), the
544 pSRKKm (Kan^{R}) IPTG inducible plasmid was used (38). An overlapping PCR strategy was
545 used to introduce cysteine mutations and to stitch the different DNA fragments to the *E.*
546 *coli* alkaline phosphatase *phoA* (lacking its signal peptide). A Gibson-assembly cloning
547 strategy was then used to insert the different DNA fragments in the linearized pSRK
548 plasmid. After sequencing, plasmids were introduced in *B. abortus* or *B. ovis* by overnight
549 mating with *E. coli* WM3064 in presence of 300 µM of diaminopimelic acid (DAP) and
550 plated on SBA plates supplemented with kanamycin.
551

552 **Building and mapping the wild-type *B. abortus* and *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* Tn-Himar**
553 **insertion libraries**

554 To build and map the different Tn-Himar insertion libraries, we used a barcoded
555 transposon mutagenesis strategy developed by Wetmore and colleagues (39). A full and
556 detailed protocol can be found in our previous paper (8). Statistics for the two different
557 transposon insertion libraries are reported in Table S3. For each Himar insertion library,
558 Tn-seq read data have been deposited in the NCBI sequence read archive: *B. abortus*
559 2308 wild-type (BioProject PRJNA493942; SRR7943723), *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* (Δ*bab1_1186*)
560 (BioProject PRJNA510139; SRR8322167).

561

562 **Cell culture and macrophage infection assays**

563 Infection of inactivated macrophages differentiated from human monocytic THP-1 cells
564 were performed as previously described (8). Briefly, for infection assays, 5 x 10^6 *B. abortus*
565 cells were used to infect 5 x 10^4 THP-1 cells (multiplicity of infection of 1:100). To
566 determine the numbers of intracellular bacteria at 1, 24 and 48 hours post-infection, the
567 infected cells were lysed, the lysate was then serially diluted (10-fold serial dilution) and
568 plated on TSA plates to enumerate CFUs.

569

570 **Mouse infection assay**

571 All mouse studies were approved by the University of Chicago Institutional Animal Care
572 and Use Committee (IACUC) and were performed as previously published (8). Briefly, 100
573 µl of a 5 x 10^5 CFU/ml *B. abortus* suspension were intraperitoneally injected into 6-week-
574 old female BALB/c mice (Harlan Laboratories, Inc.). At 1, 4, and 8 weeks post-infection, 5
575 mice per strain were sacrificed, and spleens were removed for weighing and CFU

576 counting. At week 8, blood was also collected by cardiac-puncture and serum from each
577 mouse was separated from blood using a serum separation tube (Sarstedt). Sera were
578 subsequently used for Enzyme-Linked ImmunoSorbent Assays (ELISA).
579
580 **Determination of antibody responses at 8 weeks post infection**
581 Total mouse serum IgG, IgG1, and IgG2a titers were measured using mouse-specific
582 ELISA kits by following manufacturer's instructions (eBioscience). *Brucella*-specific IgG
583 titers were determined as previously published (8).
584
585 **Spleen histology**
586 At 8 weeks post infection, spleens (n= 1 per strain) were prepared for histology as
587 previously described (8). Briefly, spleens were first fixed with formalin and submitted for
588 tissue embedding, Hematoxylin and Eosin (H & E) staining, and immunohistochemistry to
589 Nationwide Histology (Veradale, Washington). For immunohistochemistry, goat anti-
590 *Brucella* IgG was used (Tetracore, Inc). Pictures of fixed mouse spleen slides were
591 subsequently analyzed and scored.
592
593 **Plate stress assays**
594 Stress assays were performed as previously published (8). Briefly, the different *B. abortus*
595 and *B. ovis* strains were resuspended in sterile PBS or Brucella broth to an OD_{600} of ~
596 0.015 (~ 1 x 10^8 CFU/ml) and serially diluted (10-fold serial dilution). 5 µl of each dilution
597 were then spotted on TSA or SBA plates containing the different membrane stressors (2 to
598 5 µg/ml of ampicillin or carbenicillin, 200 µg/ml of deoxycholate or 2 mM EDTA final
599 concentration).

600

601 To grow *B. ovis* strains containing pSRK-derived plasmids, all liquid cultures and plates
602 were supplemented with 50 µg/ml kanamycin. When necessary, 2 mM IPTG (final
603 concentration) was added to the plates to induce expression of EipB or TtpA from pSRK.
604 We note that the *B. ovis* Δ*ttpA* strains carry the pNPTS138 suicide plasmid (used for gene
605 disruption) which results in chloramphenicol resistance. However, no chloramphenicol was
606 added to the overnight cultures or the stress plates. For carbenicillin growth/survival
607 assays, *B. ovis* strains were grown for 3 days at 37°C / 5% CO_2 on SBA plates without
608 carbenicillin, and for 5 to 6 days when these plates contained 2, 2.5 or 3 µg/ml of
609 carbenicillin.

610

611 **Cryo-electron microscopy**

612 Cryo-electron microscopy was performed as previously described (8). Briefly, *B. abortus*
613 cultures in Brucella broth (OD_{600} of ~0.015) were prepared with 2 mM EDTA or ampicillin
614 (5 µg/ml) (final concentrations). After 4 hours of incubation in the presence of EDTA or
615 ampicillin, cells were harvested and fixed in PBS + 4% formaldehyde. After 1 hour, cells
616 were pelleted and resuspended in 500 µl EM buffer (40). Per CDC guidelines, cell killing
617 was confirmed before sample removal for imaging. Fixed *Brucella* cells were vitrified on
618 glow-discharged 200 mesh copper EM-grids with extra thick R2/2 holey carbon film
619 (Quantifoil). Per grid, 3 µl of the sample was applied and automatically blotted and plunged
620 into liquid ethane with the Leica EM GP plunge-freezer. Images were collected on a Talos
621 L120C TEM (Thermo Fischer) using the Gatan cryo-TEM (626) holder. The images were
622 acquired at a defocus between 8-10 µm, with a pixel size of 0.458 nm.

623

Light microscopy images

Phase-contrast images of *B. abortus* and *B. ovis* cells from plates or liquid broth (plus or minus 1 mM IPTG) were collected using a Leica DM 5000B microscope with an HCX PL APO 63×/1.4 NA Ph3 objective. Images were acquired with a mounted Orca-ER digital camera (Hamamatsu) controlled by the Image-Pro software suite (Media Cybernetics). To prepare the different samples, cells were resuspended in PBS containing 4% formaldehyde.

Agglutination assay

Agglutination assays were performed as previously described (8). The different *Brucella* strains (*B. ovis* and *B. abortus*) were harvested and resuspended in sterile PBS at OD_{600} ~ 0.5. One milliliter of each cell suspension was loaded in a spectrophotometer cuvette and mixed with 20 µl of wild-type *B. abortus*-infected mouse serum or with acriflavine (final concentration 5 mM) and OD was measured at 600 nm at time “0” and after 2 hours. As a control, 1 ml of each cell suspension was also kept in a spectrophotometer cuvette without serum or acriflavine.

Alkaline phosphatase cell localization assay

To determine the cellular localization of EipB, we used a *B. ovis* strain transformed with the pSRK plasmid carrying *B. abortus eipB* C-terminally fused to *E. coli phoA*. Two versions of this plasmid were built: one carrying the full-length *eipB*, which expressed the protein with its signal peptide, and one carrying a short version of *eipB*, which expressed the protein lacking the signal peptide. Alkaline phosphatase assays were performed as previously described (8). Briefly, aliquots of overnight culture of *B. ovis* (grown in presence or

absence of 1 mM IPTG) were mixed with 5-Bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate (BCIP, final concentration 200 µM). After 2 hours of incubation, the color change was visually assessed and pictures were taken. The same experiment was performed with spent medium supernatants.

Size exclusion chromatography

A DNA fragment corresponding to *B. abortus eipB* lacking the signal peptide (residues 31 - 280) was cloned into pET28a and transformed into the protein overexpression *E. coli* Rosetta (DE3) *pLysS* strain. Protein expression and purification was conducted using a Ni^{2+} affinity purification protocol as previously published (8). The purified protein was then dialyzed against a Tris-NaCl buffer (10 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl). EipB oligomeric state was analyzed by size exclusion chromatography as previously described (8). Briefly, after concentration, a protein sample (500 µl at 5 mg/ml) was injected onto a GE Healthcare Superdex 200 10/300 GL column (flow rate: 0.5 ml/min). Elution profile was measured at 280 nm and 500 µl fractions were collected during the run; the dialysis buffer described above was used for all runs. Protein standards (blue dextran / aldolase / conalbumin / ovalbumin) injected onto the column were used to construct a calibration curve to estimate the molecular weight of purified EipB.

EipB expression, purification and crystallization

The DNA fragment corresponding to the *B. abortus* EipB protein (residues 31 - 280) was cloned into the pMCSG68 plasmid using a protocol previously published (8). For protein expression, an *E. coli* BL21-Gold(DE3) strain was used. Selenomethionine (Se-Met) protein expression and purification was performed as previously described (8). The purified

protein was then dialyzed against 20 mM HEPES (pH 8), 250 mM NaCl, and 2 mM DTT buffer and its concentration was determined. The purified Se-Met EipB protein was concentrated to 160 mg/ml for crystallization. Initial crystallization screening was carried out using the sitting-drop, vapor-diffusion technique. After a week, EipB crystallized in the triclinic space group P1 from the condition #70 (F10) of the MCSG-2 crystallization kit, which contains 24% PEG1500 and 20% glycerol. Prior to flash freezing in liquid nitrogen, crystals were cryo-protected by briefly washing them in the crystallization solution containing 25% glycerol.

Crystallographic data collection and data processing

Se-Met crystal diffraction was measured at a temperature of 100 K using a 2-second exposure/degree of rotation over 260°. Crystals diffracted to a resolution of 2.1 Å and the corresponding diffraction images were collected on the ADSC Q315r detector with an X-ray wavelength near the selenium edge of 12.66 keV (0.97929 Å) for SAD phasing at the 19-ID beamline (SBC-CAT, Advanced Photon Source, Argonne, Illinois). Diffraction data were processed using the HKL3000 suite (41). *B. abortus* EipB crystals were twinned and the data had to be reprocessed and scaled from the $P2_1$ space group to the lower symmetry space group P1 with the following cell dimensions: a= 47.36 Å, b= 69.24 Å, c= 83.24 Å, and α= 90.09°, β= 90.02°, γ= 78.66° (see Table S2). The structure was determined by SAD phasing using SHELX C/D/E, mlphare, and dm, and initial automatic protein model building with Buccaneer software, all implemented in the HKL3000 software package (41). The initial model was manually adjusted using COOT (42) and iteratively refined using COOT, PHENIX (43), and REFMAC (44); 5% of the total reflections was kept out of the refinement in both REFMAC and PHENIX throughout the refinement. The final

696 structure converged to an R_{work} of 19.5% and R_{free} of 24.5% and includes four protein
697 chains (A: 30-270, B: 31-271, C: 30-271, and D: 30-270), 9 ethylene glycol molecules, two
698 glycerol molecules, and 129 ordered water molecules. The EipB protein contained three N-
699 terminal residues (Ser-Asn-Ala) that remain from the cleaved tag. The stereochemistry of
700 the structure was checked using PROCHECK (45), and the Ramachandran plot and was
701 validated using the PDB validation server. Coordinates of EipB have been deposited in the
702 PDB (PDB ID: 6NTR). Crystallographic data and refined model statistics are presented in
703 Table S2. Diffraction images have been uploaded to the SBGrid diffraction data server
704 (Data DOI: 10.15785/SBGRID/445).
705
706 **Disulfide bond reduction assays**
707 DNA fragments corresponding to *B. abortus eipB* cysteine mutants (C69S, C278S, and
708 C69S+C278S) and lacking the signal peptide (residues M1-A30) were cloned into pET28a
709 and transformed into the protein overexpression *E. coli* Rosetta (DE3) *pLysS* strain.
710 Protein expression and Ni^{2+} affinity purification were conducted using protocols previously
711 published (8). Briefly, for each protein, a pellet corresponding to a 250 ml culture was
712 resuspended in 1.5 ml of BugBuster Master Mix (MD Millipore) supplemented with 50 µl of
713 DNAse I (5mg/ml). After 20 min on ice, cell debris was pelleted and the supernatant was
714 mixed with 200 µl of Ni-NTA Superflow resin (Qiagen). Beads were washed with 8 ml of a
715 10 mM imidazole Tris-NaCl buffer (10 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl) and 5 ml of a 75
716 mM imidazole Tris-NaCl buffer. Proteins were eluted with 200 µl of a 500 mM imidazole
717 Tris-NaCl buffer. 50 µl of each purified protein (at 0.5 mg/ml) were then mixed with 12.5 µl
718 of a 4x protein loading dye containing or not 1 mM of DTT. Samples were boiled for 5 min
719 and 10 µl were loaded on a 12% SDS-PAGE.

720

721 **Thermal shift protein stability assay**

722 A thermal shift assay to assess protein stability was performed on 20 µl samples
723 containing 25 µM of purified *B. abortus* EipB^{WT} or EipB$^{C69S+C278S}$, 50x Sypro Orange
724 (Invitrogen) and 2 mM DTT when needed. Each protein sample and solution was prepared
725 with the same dialysis buffer (10 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA). Ninety-
726 six-well plates (MicroAmp EnduratePlate Optical 96-well fast clear reaction plates; Applied
727 Biosystems) were used and heated from 25 to 95°C with a ramp rate of 0.05°C/s and read
728 by a thermocycler (QuantumStudio 5 real-time PCR system; Applied Biosystems - Thermo
729 Fisher Scientific) using excitation and emission wavelengths of 470 ± 15 nm and 558 ± 11
730 nm, respectively. Protein Thermal Shift software v1.3 (Applied Biosystems - Thermo Fisher
731 Scientific) was used for calculation of the first derivative of the curve to determine the
732 melting temperature.

733

734 **Bacterial two-hybrid protein interaction assay**

735 To assay EipB interaction with TtpA, we used a bacterial two-hybrid system (46). Briefly, a
736 *B. abortus eipB* DNA fragment (lacking the signal peptide) was cloned into pKT25 vector
737 and a *B. abortus ttpA* fragment (lacking the signal peptide) was cloned into pUT18 or
738 pUT18C vectors. The different pUT18, pUT18C and pKT25 combinations were then co-
739 transformed into a chemically competent *E. coli* reporter strain BTH101 and spotted on LB
740 agar plates (ampicillin 100 µg/ml + kanamycin 50 µg/ml) supplemented with X-Gal (40
741 µg/ml).

742

743 **Pull-down assay between EipB and TtpA**

744 To evaluate the interaction between *B. abortus* wild-type and cysteine mutant EipB and
745 TtpA, the different genes were cloned into pET28a and pMAL-c2G expression plasmids
746 and transformed in *E. coli* Rosetta (DE3) *pLysS* expression strain. The corresponding
747 proteins (His_6-$EipB^{WT}$ or His_6-EipB cysteine mutants, and MBP-TtpA) were overexpressed
748 and purified using nickel affinity and amylose affinity gravity columns, respectively. Two
749 milliliters of amylose resin were saturated with 10 ml of a clarified cell lysate corresponding
750 to a 500 ml culture pellet of IPTG induced *Rosetta* pMAL-c2G-*ttpA*. Beads were thoroughly
751 washed with 50 ml of a Tris-NaCl buffer (10 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl) and 200 µl of
752 these beads were mixed with 500 µl of nickel purified EipB at ~0.5 mg/ml (see reference
753 (8) for a detailed nickel-affinity purification protocol). After 30 min incubation in presence or
754 absence of 1 mM DTT, the flow-through was saved and the beads were thoroughly
755 washed with a Tris-NaCl buffer supplemented or not with 1 mM DTT. The protein was
756 eluted with 200 µl of the same buffer containing 20 mM of maltose. The different protein
757 samples (elutions and flow-throughs) were run on a 12% SDS-PAGE and Coomassie
758 stained.
759
760 **Bioinformatics**
761 Figures of the structures, structural alignments, electrostatic potential representations and
762 root mean square deviation (rmsd) calculations were performed using PyMOL (PyMOL
763 Molecular Graphics System, version 1.7.4; Schrödinger, LLC). Surface hydrophobicity was
764 evaluated using the YRB python script (47). The XtalPred server (48) and Dali server (49)
765 were used to identify proteins with the highest structural and sequence relatedness. The
766 BLAST server (https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi) was used to identify homologs of *B.*
767 *abortus* EipB in different taxa within the *Alphaproteobacteria*. The EipB weblogo was

768 generated by aligning 447 DUF1849 protein sequences of *Alphaproteobacteria* retrieved
769 from the EMBL-EBI website (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/interpro/entry/IPR015000/proteins-
770 matched). Alignment was generated with Clustal Omega
771 (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalo/). When necessary, the C-terminus of
772 sequences were realigned by hand. The Clustal alignment file was converted to a fasta file
773 using
774 http://sequenceconversion.bugaco.com/converter/biology/sequences/clustal_to_fasta.php.
775 This file was then submitted to skylign server (http://skylign.org/) to generate a weblogo.
776 The alignment was processed with the following options: remove mostly-empty columns /
777 alignment sequences are full length / score.
778

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784

785 **Author contributions**

786 JH, JWW and SC contributed to the design and conceptualization of the study; JH, JWW,
787 AF, DMC, JXC, EU, AB, LB, GB, YK and SC performed the experiments, acquired and
788 analyzed the data; JH, JWW, AF and SC interpreted the data; JH and SC wrote the
789 original draft of the manuscript.
790

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945
946 **Figure 1:** The DUF1849 sequence family is restricted to *Alphaproteobacteria*. Bayesian
947 phylogenetic tree showing the distribution of DUF1849 genes in different orders within the
948 class *Alphaproteobacteria* (P: present, A: absent). Bayesian support values are shown
949 when <100%; nodes were collapsed when support was <50%; adapted from Williams and
950 colleagues (50). In *Brucella abortus* (order *Rhizobiales*), DUF1849 is encoded by gene
951 locus *bab1_1186* (i.e. *eipB*).
952
953 **Figure 2:** *eipB* is a genetic determinant of *B. abortus* virulence. A) *In vitro* macrophage
954 infection assay: infection of THP-1 cells with wild-type *B. abortus* 2308 (black line), Δ*eipB*
955 (blue line) and the *eipB* complementation strain (pink line). The number of *B. abortus*
956 CFUs recovered from the THP-1 cells at 1, 24, and 48 hours post infection is plotted. Each
957 data point (n= 3 per strain) is the mean ± the standard error of the mean. B) *In vivo* mouse
958 infection assay: female BALB/c mice were injected intraperitoneally with wild-type, Δ*eipB*,
959 or Δ*eipB*-complementation strains. Spleen weights (upper graph) and bacterial burden
960 (lower graph) were measured at 1, 4, and 8 weeks post-infection. Graphs represent data
961 from uninfected, naïve mice (in green) or mice infected with wild-type (black), Δ*eipB* (blue),
962 or complementation (pink) strains. Data presented are the mean ± the standard error of the
963 mean; n= 5 mice per strain per time point. One-way ANOVA followed by Dunnett's post
964 test (to wild-type) supports the conclusion that spleens infected with the *eipB* deletion
965 strain were significantly smaller at 4 (****, $p<0.0001$) and 8 weeks (****, $p<0.0001$) and had
966 fewer CFU than wild-type at 4 (****, $p<0.0001$) and 8 weeks (***, $p<0.0007$). C-F) Antibody
967 quantification in mouse serum harvested at 8 weeks post-infection from naïve control mice
968 or mice infected with wild-type, Δ*eipB*, or complementation strains. Amounts of total IgG at
969 8 weeks (C), *Brucella*-specific IgG (D), IgG1 (E), and IgG2a (F) were determined by

970 ELISA. Each data point (naïve: n= 3, WT: n= 2, Δ*eipB* and complementation: n= 4) is the
971 mean ± the standard error of the mean.
972
973 **Figure 3:** Assessing the effect of cell envelope stressors on *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* growth and
974 survival. A) Envelope stress survival assays. Serially diluted cultures of *B. abortus* wild-
975 type, Δ*eipB,* and complementation strains were spotted on plain TSA plates or TSA plates
976 containing EDTA (2 mM), deoxycholate (0.04% w/v), or ampicillin (5 µg/ml). After 3 to 5
977 days of growth at 37°C / 5% CO_2, CFUs for each condition were enumerated and plotted.
978 This experiment was repeated four times; each data point is the mean ± the standard error
979 of the mean. One-way ANOVA followed by Dunnett's post test (to wild-type) supports the
980 conclusion that the *eipB* deletion strain had significantly fewer CFU than wild-type in
981 presence of EDTA (****, $p<0.0001$), ampicillin (****, $p<0.0001$), and deoxycholate (***,
982 $p<0.0003$). B) Light micrograph of *B. abortus* wild-type (left), Δ*eipB* (middle) and
983 overexpression (right; induced with 5 mM IPTG) liquid cultures grown overnight in Brucella
984 broth. C) CryoEM images of *B. abortus* wild-type and Δ*eipB* cells cultivated in liquid broth
985 that either remained untreated or were treated with 2 mM EDTA or 5 µg/ml ampicillin for 4
986 hours.
987
988 **Figure 4:** EipB is monomeric in solution and is secreted to the *Brucella* periplasm. A)
989 Alkaline phosphatase assay. Overnight cultures of *B. ovis* expressing EipB with (+) or
990 without (-) its signal peptide and fused to *E. coli* PhoA, were grown in presence (+) or
991 absence (-) of 1 mM IPTG inducer. In a 96-well plate, these cultures were mixed with BCIP
992 (200 µM final concentration) and developed for 2 hours at 37°C / 5% CO_2. Only the strain
993 expressing EipB-$PhoA_{Ec}$ with a signal peptide turned blue, providing evidence that the

protein is located in the periplasm. As a control, spent medium supernatants were mixed with BCIP to test whether EipB-PhoA$_{Ec}$ is secreted into the medium. After 2 hours incubation, no color change was observed, indicating that EipB-PhoA$_{Ec}$ is not exported outside the cell. These experiments were performed at least three times with independent clones. A representative image is shown. B) Size exclusion chromatography elution profile of purified EipB (in grey). Elution fractions were loaded on a SDS-PAGE, and a single band migrating at ~30 kDa was visible. Elution peaks of the molecular weight standards (blue dextran: 2000 kDa, aldolase: 157 kDa, conalbumin: 76 kDa, ovalbumin: 43 kDa) are shown as red line. This experiment was performed twice and yielded similar elution profiles.

Figure 5: EipB adopts a β-spiral fold. A) Left: X-ray structure of EipB. EipB consist of 14 β-strands (in green) and 2 α-helices (in violet). The N-terminus (A30) and the C-terminus (D270) are reported on this structure. Right: simplified representation of EipB; color code is the same as before. B) Different orientations of EipB structure; color code is the same as before.

Figure 6: Simplified representation of EipB structure. A) EipB adopts a cup-like structure, fourteen β-strands (in green) form an overlapping β-spiral (β5-β6-β7-β8 overlap with β9-β10 connecting loop, highlighted in yellow in panel A and B). α1 (in violet) and the loop connecting β12 and β13 form the bottom of this “cup”. B) Amino acid sequence of EipB. The sequence corresponding to the predicted signal peptide is highlighted in pink. β-strands and α-helices are represented by green arrows and violet cylinders, respectively. Hydrophobic (red) and hydrophilic (blue) residues are reported below the sequence.

1018 Residues with side chains present inside EipB cavity are highlighted with grey bars.
1019 Cysteines C69 and C278 are highlighted with orange dots. Structural elements forming the
1020 bottom of the β-spiral are highlighted with a black line; overlapping regions are highlighted
1021 with a yellow line.
1022
1023 **Figure 7:** EipB has an internal disulfide bond. A) Cysteines C69 and C278 are spatially
1024 proximal in the EipB structure and form a disulfide bond. C278 is present at the EipB C-
1025 terminus that follows β14, and C69 is present in a loop connecting β2 and β3. B) His-
1026 tagged wild-type EipB and EipB cysteine mutant proteins (C69S, C278S, and
1027 C69S+C278S) were purified and mixed with a protein loading buffer plus or minus 1 mM
1028 DTT. Protein samples were resolved by 12% SDS-PAGE. This experiment was performed
1029 three times. Picture of a representative gel is presented. C) Growth on SBA plates
1030 containing 3 µg/ml of carbenicillin with (+) or without (-) 2 mM IPTG of a serially diluted
1031 (10-fold dilution) *B. ovis* Δ*eipB* strain ectopically expressing wild-type EipB (P_{lac}-*eipB*),
1032 C69S mutant (P_{lac}-*eipB*^{C69S}), C278S mutant (P_{lac}-*eipB*^{C69S}), or C69S+C278S mutant (P_{lac}-
1033 *eipB*$^{C69S+C278S}$). *B. ovis* wild-type (WT) and Δ*eipB* carrying the pSRK empty vector (EV)
1034 were used as a control. Days of growth at 37°C / 5% CO_2 are reported for each plate. A
1035 representative picture of the different plates is presented. D) Enumerated CFUs after
1036 growth on SBA plates containing 3 µg/ml of carbenicillin with (+) or without (-) 2 mM IPTG
1037 of serially diluted (10-fold dilution) *B. ovis* Δ*eipB* strains expressing different versions of
1038 *eipB* from a plasmid (wild-type and cysteine mutants; see panel C legend). Empty vector
1039 (EV) strains and SBA plates with no carbenicillin, plus or minus IPTG, were used as
1040 controls. This experiment was independently performed twice with two different clones
1041 each time, and all plate assays were done in triplicate. Each data point is the mean ± the

1042 standard error of the mean. One-way ANOVA followed by Dunnett's post test (to wild-type)
1043 supports the conclusion that *eipB*-dependent protection against the cell wall antibiotic,
1044 carbenicillin, is significantly diminished when disulfide-forming residues C69 (**, $p<0.005$)
1045 and C278 (**, $p<0.003$) are individually or both (*, $p<0.01$) mutated to serine. This is effect
1046 is evident with leaky *eipB* expression from P_{lac}, but diminished when expression of wild-
1047 type and mutant *eipB* alleles is induced by IPTG.
1048
1049 **Figure 8:** *B. abortus eipB* deletion is synthetically lethal with Tn-Himar disruption of
1050 *bab1_0430*, which encodes a tetratricopeptide repeat (TPR) protein. A) Identification of *B.*
1051 *abortus* genes that are synthetically lethal or sick with *eipB* deletion. Tn-Himar insertion
1052 strains per gene (black dots) obtained in a *B. abortus* Δ*eipB* background are plotted as a
1053 function of strains per gene in a wild-type background. *bab1_0430*, for which we observed
1054 significantly fewer insertions in Δ*eipB* than in wild-type, is represented as an orange dot.
1055 Other synthetic sick genes are also evident in the plot, including genes involved in LPS O-
1056 antigen synthesis in light-blue: *wbkF (*locus *bab1_0535)*; *wboA* (*bab1_0999*); *gmd*
1057 (*bab1_0545*); *wboB* (*bab1_1000*); *wbkE* (*bab1_0563*); *rfbE* (*bab1_0542*); *wbkD*
1058 (*bab1_0534*); *rfbD* (*bab1_0543*); *per* (*bab1_0544*); *wbkA* (*bab1_0553*). Genes related to
1059 peptidoglycan synthesis in pink: *mltA* (*bab1_2076*); penicillin-binding protein (*bab1_607*).
1060 Apolipoprotein N-acyltransferase *lnt* (*bab1_2158*) is in grey; LysR transcriptional regulator
1061 *vtlR* (*bab1_1517*) is in light green; extracellular solute binding protein *yejA1* (*bab1_0010*) is
1062 in dark blue; general stress response kinase *lovhK* (*bab2_0652*) is in yellow; metabolic
1063 genes methionine synthase (*bab1_0188*) and homoserine dehydrogenase (*bab1_1293*)
1064 are in red. B) Growth on SBA plates containing 2 µg/ml of carbenicillin ± 2 mM IPTG of
1065 serially diluted (10-fold dilution) *B. ovis* Δ*ttpA* strains carrying the pSRK empty vector (EV)

1066 or ectopically expressing wild-type TtpA (P_{lac}-*ttpA*). The wild-type (WT) *B. ovis* pSRK
1067 empty vector (EV) strain was used as a control. Days of growth at 37°C / 5% CO_2 are
1068 reported for each plate. A representative picture of the different plates is presented. C)
1069 Enumerated CFUs, after growth on SBA plates containing 2.5 µg/ml of carbenicillin ± 2 mM
1070 IPTG, of serially diluted (10-fold dilution) *B. ovis* wild-type (black) and Δ*ttpA* (dark pink)
1071 strains. The Δ*ttpA* strain was either transformed with the empty vector (EV) or with pSRK-
1072 *ttpA*. Empty vector (EV) wild-type strain and SBA plates with no carbenicillin, and plus or
1073 minus IPTG were used as controls. This experiment was independently performed twice
1074 with two different clones each time, and all plate assays were done in triplicate. Each data
1075 point is the mean ± the standard error of the mean.
1076
1077 **Figure 9:** Overexpression of TtpA protects against carbenicillin treatment; protection
1078 requires EipB. A) Growth on SBA plates containing 3 µg/ml of carbenicillin ± 2 mM IPTG of
1079 serially diluted (10-fold dilution) *B. ovis* wild-type (WT) and Δ*eipB* strains expressing wild-
1080 type EipB (P_{lac}-*eipB*) or TtpA (P_{lac}-*ttpA*). *B. ovis* strains carrying the pSRK empty vector
1081 (EV) were used as a control. Days of growth at 37°C / 5% CO_2 are reported for each plate.
1082 A representative picture of the different plates is presented. B) Enumerated CFUs after
1083 growth on SBA plates containing 3 µg/ml of carbenicillin ± 2 mM IPTG of serially diluted
1084 (10-fold dilution) *B. ovis* wild-type (black) and Δ*eipB* (dark pink) strains ectopically
1085 expressing *eipB* or *ttpA*. Empty vector (EV) strains and SBA plates with no carbenicillin,
1086 and plus or minus IPTG were used as controls. This experiment was independently
1087 performed twice with two different clones each time, and all plate assays were done in
1088 triplicate. Each data point is the mean ± the standard error of the mean.
1089