

# Structural insights into the functional versatility of an FHA domain protein in mycobacterial signaling

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## ABSTRACT

Forkhead-associated (FHA) domains are modules that bind phosphothreonine (pThr) residues in signaling cascades. The FHA-containing mycobacterial protein GarA is a central element of a phosphorylation-dependent signaling pathway that redirects metabolic flux in response to amino acid starvation or cell growth requirements. GarA acts as a phosphorylation-dependent ON/OFF molecular switch. In its unphosphorylated ON state, the GarA FHA domain engages in phosphorylation-independent interactions with various metabolic enzymes that orchestrate nitrogen flow, such as 2-oxoglutarate decarboxylase (KGD). However, phosphorylation at the GarA amino-terminal region by the protein kinases PknB or PknG triggers the intramolecular association with its own FHA domain, thus blocking all downstream interactions. To investigate these different FHA binding modes, we solved the crystal structures of the mycobacterial upstream (phosphorylation-dependent) complex PknB-GarA and the downstream (phosphorylation-independent) complex GarA-KGD. Our results show that the phosphorylated activation loop of PknB serves as a docking site to recruit GarA through canonical FHA-pThr interactions. However, the same GarA FHA binding pocket targets an allosteric site on unphosphorylated KGD, where a key element of recognition is a phosphomimetic aspartate. Further enzymatic and mutagenesis studies revealed that GarA acted as a dynamic allosteric inhibitor of KGD by preventing crucial motions in KGD that are necessary for catalysis. Our results provide strong evidence for physiological phosphomimetics, supporting numerous mutagenesis studies using such approaches, and illustrate how evolution can shape a single FHA binding pocket to specifically interact with multiple phosphorylated and non-phosphorylated protein partners.

## INTRODUCTION

Reversible serine-threonine protein phosphorylation mediated by Hanks-type serine-threonine protein kinases (STPKs) and phosphatases has emerged as a major regulatory mechanism in bacteria (1-3). As shown by extensive studies in eukaryotic cells, phosphorylation at serine, threonine, and tyrosine residues can directly alter the biochemical function of a protein, but more often it creates new docking sites for phosphorylation-dependent binding partners (4). This supports the idea that phosphorylation-based signal transduction systems can be thought of as tripartite toolkits composed of protein kinases acting as ‘writers’, protein phosphatases as ‘erasers’, and phospho-binding domains as downstream ‘readers’ of the posttranslational modification (5). Since the discovery of Src homology 2 (SH2) domains (6), which specifically bind phosphotyrosine residues, many different types of reader domains have been described in eukaryotic cell signalling. The current list of known modules that specifically bind to phosphoserine (pSer) and phosphothreonine (pThr) residues includes no less than 14 unrelated domain types (5). Remarkably, however, in bacteria the widespread distribution of STPKs contrasts with the finding that only one of those reader protein modules has so far been found, namely the Forkhead-associated (FHA) domain (7).

First identified within the forkhead family of transcription factors (8), FHA domains serve as adaptor modules that specifically recognize pThr-containing proteins and mediate protein-protein interactions that are driven by reversible phosphorylation of many eukaryotic regulatory proteins with roles in the DNA damage response, checkpoint signaling pathways, cell growth, and cell cycle regulation (9). FHA modules share a conserved fold consisting of a 10- or 11-stranded  $\beta$ -barrel that contains the pThr-binding pocket at one of the apical surfaces (10, 11). The atomic structures of over 50 FHA domains are currently available, and the majority of these were determined either in the absence of a cognate binding partner or by using a phosphopeptide

to represent the binding partner. This strategy is apparently justified by structures in which the target pThr recognized by the FHA lies in an unstructured N- or C-terminal region (12-14). Notably, some FHA domains bind non-phosphorylated protein partners using surfaces distinct from the pThr-binding pocket. This may occur in FHA domains that lack the conserved phosphate-interacting residues, such as that of kinesin KIF13 (15), or that use their canonical pThr-binding site to interact with a third protein partner, such as the FHA1 domain of Rad51 (16).

In prokaryotes, FHA domain-containing proteins are ubiquitous in three main phyla, namely Actinobacteria, Cyanobacteria, and selected Gram-negative Proteobacteria (7), but their precise roles in bacterial physiology are generally not well characterized. We focused on GarA, member of an Actinobacterial-restricted family of FHA domain-containing proteins that play a central role in the kinase-mediated control of glutamate metabolism (17, 18). Mycobacterial GarA was initially described as a glycogen accumulation regulator (hence its name) in *Mycobacterium smegmatis* (19) and identified as an optimal substrate of the serine-threonine protein kinase PknB in *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* protein extracts (20). Subsequently, it was characterized as a key regulator of glutamate metabolism in *M. tuberculosis*, *M. smegmatis* (13, 18, 21, 22), and *Corynebacterium glutamicum*, wherein the GarA orthologue was named OdhI for 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase inhibitor (23, 24). GarA is essential to sustain *M. tuberculosis* growth and viability, but it is dispensable in *M. smegmatis* and *C. glutamicum*, where disruption of the *garA* or *odhI* genes, respectively, caused a distinctive, nutrient-dependent phenotype (23, 25).

GarA protein family members are small proteins (~160 amino acids) consisting of a C-terminal FHA domain linked to an unstructured N-terminal extension of 40–50 residues that includes a

consensus phosphorylation motif ETTSVFR (Fig. 1A and fig. S1). GarA is a key element of a conserved STPK-mediated signaling pathway that controls glutamate metabolism (Fig. 1B). Unphosphorylated GarA was shown to activate the glutamate synthase (GS) complex (13) and to inhibit the activities of E1o, the first component of the 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase (ODH) multiprotein complex, and GDH, a NAD-dependent glutamate dehydrogenase (18) in mycobacteria. Although only the interaction of the GarA homologue OdhI with E1o has been reported in *C. glutamicum* (23), the net outcome of the unphosphorylated OdhI activity is the same as for GarA, namely a redirection of the metabolic flux towards the synthesis of glutamate (Fig. 1B). In response to nutrient availability or cell growth requirements (22), phosphorylation at the first or second Thr residue within the ETTSVFR motif, respectively by STPKs PknG or PknB (Fig. 1B), triggers its intramolecular association with the C-terminal FHA domain, switching off the modulatory interactions with downstream metabolic enzymes (12, 13, 26). Therefore, at different stages of the signaling pathway (Fig. 1B) GarA acts as either a specific STPK protein substrate, a phosphorylation-dependent molecular ON/OFF switch, or an allosteric metabolic modulator. Quite unusually, GarA performs all these tasks by using its FHA domain to specifically recognize upstream pThr-containing proteins and downstream non-phosphorylated protein partners. In order to gather structural insights into this intriguing functional versatility, we report here structural and biochemical studies of the upstream (phosphorylation-dependent) signaling complex PknB-GarA, and the downstream (phosphorylation-independent) effector complex GarA-E1o. These studies revealed that the phosphorylated activation loop of PknB serves as a docking platform for the recruitment of the FHA domain-containing protein substrate, and that GarA allosterically inhibits E1o by precluding protein motions required for catalysis. Altogether, these observations illustrate how a canonical FHA domain binding pocket can be fine-tuned to specifically interact with both phosphorylated as well as non-phosphorylated protein partners, clearly extending the actual

functions of prokaryotic FHA domain proteins beyond a simple role of phosphorylation ‘reader’ domains, with important implications for bacterial cell signaling.

## RESULTS

### *The phospho-dependent signaling complex PknB-GarA*

In previous work we showed that *M. tuberculosis* GarA is an efficient substrate of various STPKs, mainly PknB and PknG (18, 20). Phosphorylation occurs at Thr<sup>21</sup> (PknG) or Thr<sup>22</sup> (PknB) in the disordered N-terminal extension of GarA, requiring in both cases specific docking interactions between phosphorylated residues in the kinase and the substrate’s FHA domain. The auto-phosphorylated docking sites in PknG are located outside the catalytic domain (18), but those in PknB (pThr<sup>171</sup> and pThr<sup>173</sup>) are both in the kinase activation loop (20) and their interaction with the GarA FHA domain would thus be expected to sequester the activation loop away from the active kinase conformation (27). To address this intriguing issue, we sought to characterize the structure of *M. tuberculosis* GarA in complex with the catalytic domain (residues 1-279) of wild-type PknB (hereafter referred to as PknB<sub>CD</sub>). The autophosphorylated PknB<sub>CD</sub>–GarA interaction was observed in solution (fig. S2) with a dissociation constant ( $K_D$ ) in the micromolar range (fig. S3). Upon extensive crystallization trials, however, all the crystals we obtained contained PknB<sub>CD</sub> in a ‘back-to-back’ homodimer conformation (28, 29) with no bound GarA. The reported  $K_D$  for dimerization is high (2.9 mM) (30), suggesting that dimerization of PknB<sub>CD</sub> in different crystal forms (28-31) may result from the high protein concentrations used for crystallization. To explore whether kinase dimerization could exclude GarA-binding, we produced a monomeric form of PknB<sub>CD</sub> using the point mutation Leu<sup>33</sup> to glutamic acid (PknB<sub>CD,L33E</sub>) that abrogated PknB dimerization (30) but retained wild-type-like phosphorylation activity on GarA (see next section). This monomeric form of PknB was

successfully crystallized in complex with GarA and AMP-PCP, a non-hydrolysable ATP analog, and the crystal structure of the ternary complex was determined at 2.3 Å resolution (Table 1).

The crystal structure contained two molecules of the ternary complex in the asymmetric unit and revealed that the FHA domain of GarA interacted primarily with the phosphorylated activation loop of PknB (Fig. 2A). Despite using a non-hydrolysable ATP analogue, no electron density was visible for the ETTSVFR peptide substrate (GarA residues 20-26) in the kinase active site. Indeed, the entire N-terminal extension of GarA, residues 1-45, was mostly disordered in the crystal structure, in agreement with the high flexibility observed for this region in the NMR structures of unphosphorylated *M. tuberculosis* GarA and *C. glutamicum* OdhI (12, 13). The only exception was a short peptide fragment (corresponding to GarA residues 26-34) that was clearly visible in the electron density map for one of the two independent complexes, between helix  $\alpha$ G in PknB and a positively charged region of the FHA domain of GarA (Fig. 2A and Fig. 2B). This position would be compatible with GarA Thr<sup>22</sup> reaching the kinase active site, because the same peptide fragment occupies a similar position against the FHA domain core in the NMR structures of phosphorylated GarA and OdhI (fig. S4).

### ***A canonical phosphate-binding pocket in the FHA domain***

The phosphorylated activation loop, which was systematically disordered in other PknB crystal structures (28-31), now exhibited an extended conformation at the PknB-GarA interface (Fig. 2A). The observed conformation, positioning the phosphate groups of pThr<sup>171</sup> and pThr<sup>173</sup> far (>10 Å) from the guanidinium group of the HRD motif, differentiates PknB from eukaryotic kinases that require interaction between HRD and pThr for activation. The loop follows a path across the surface of the FHA domain that is similar to that previously observed in other FHA

domain-phosphopeptide complex structures (fig. S5). The phosphate-binding site of the FHA domain, mainly defined by the loops between strands  $\beta$ 4- $\beta$ 5 and  $\beta$ 6- $\beta$ 7 (fig. S6), binds pThr<sup>171</sup> from the PknB activation loop (Fig. 2C). The phosphate group is stabilized by intermolecular hydrogen bonding interactions with several GarA residues: the guanidinium groups of Arg<sup>81</sup> and Arg<sup>96</sup>, the hydroxyl group of Ser<sup>95</sup> and the main chain nitrogen atom of Arg<sup>96</sup>. Additional H-bonds are formed between the phosphopeptide backbone adjacent to pThr<sup>171</sup> in the kinase and the side chains of Arg<sup>81</sup> and Asn<sup>117</sup> in the FHA domain. All these interactions involve residues from three conserved motifs in bacterial FHA domains (7), namely G<sup>80</sup>R at the C-terminus of strand  $\beta$ 3, S<sup>95</sup>RxH just preceding  $\beta$ 5, and motif S<sup>115</sup>xNG in the turn  $\beta$ 6- $\beta$ 7 (fig. S1), indicating a ‘canonical’ mode of pThr recognition.

Uniquely amongst FHA-pThr complexes, however, an additional structural element directly interacts with the phosphorylated residue. The guanidinium group of Arg<sup>58</sup> on PknB helix  $\alpha$ C makes a strong salt bridge with pThr<sup>171</sup> (Fig. 2C), promoting major structural changes in the helix (see next section). Additionally, the total PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA interface of 1100 Å<sup>2</sup> (including the N-terminal GarA peptide 26-34) is higher than those typically observed for FHA-phosphopeptide complexes. The additional contacts are primarily mediated by the positively charged region formed by the loops  $\beta$ 1- $\beta$ 2 and  $\beta$ 9- $\beta$ 10 in the FHA domain of GarA that interact with the C-terminus of the PknB activation loop, preceding helix  $\alpha$ E, and with helix  $\alpha$ G through the N-terminal GarA peptide (Fig. 2B).

Upon binding of the GarA FHA domain, the PknB regulatory helix  $\alpha$ C moves away from the conformation observed in the back-to-back PknB homodimer (28). The helical axis is displaced 6 Å towards the core of the PknB N-lobe and the helix undergoes partial unwinding at its C-terminus (Fig. 2D). As a consequence, the overall conformation of the kinase N-lobe in complex

with GarA appears to be incompatible with that observed in the PknB homodimer, possibly accounting for our unsuccessful attempts to crystallize the complex between GarA and wild-type PknB<sub>CD</sub>. Furthermore, these GarA-induced changes in helix  $\alpha$ C weaken a well-conserved intramolecular salt bridge in the kinase domain whose integrity is usually important for activity because it positions the  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -phosphate groups of ATP correctly for catalysis (32). This bridge between Lys<sup>40</sup> and Glu<sup>59</sup> from helix  $\alpha$ C is 4.2 Å in the PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA complex, compared to 2.8 Å in homodimeric PknB<sub>CD</sub>. Similar conformational changes have been described for two PknB<sub>CD</sub> point mutants (30), suggesting a high conformational plasticity of the active kinase.

#### ***The kinase activation loop as a docking site for FHA-mediated substrate recruitment***

To determine the effects of the observed conformational changes on kinase activity, we measured the phosphorylation activity of PknB<sub>CD</sub> towards full-length GarA compared to that towards an N-terminal GarA peptide, which contained the phosphorylation site but lacked the FHA domain. The activities of the point mutant PknB<sub>CD,L33E</sub> on both substrates were roughly equivalent to those of wild-type PknB<sub>CD</sub> on the same substrates (Fig. 2E), confirming that the amino acid substitution L33E had no major effect on the kinase activity under the assayed conditions. In contrast, the two versions of PknB<sub>CD</sub> were both markedly less active toward the GarA-derived peptide substrate compared to full length GarA (Fig. 2E), indicating that GarA phosphorylation is strongly dependent on the interaction between the kinase activation loop and the FHA domain. An important question here is whether the phosphorylated activation loop is acting as a passive docking platform for substrate recruitment (with no increase of the intrinsic kinase activity) or, alternatively, whether FHA domain binding has an allosteric effect on the kinase activity. To elucidate this issue, we produced a GarA deletion mutant that comprises only the FHA domain but is devoid of the N-terminal phosphorylatable extension, and assayed the kinase activity of PknB<sub>CD</sub> on the peptide substrate in the presence or absence of this mutant.

The addition of FHA failed to increase (it even slightly decreased) the intrinsic kinase activity of PknB<sub>CD</sub> or PknB<sub>CD,L33E</sub> towards the peptide substrate (Fig. 2F), indicating that the FHA domain of GarA does not function as an allosteric kinase activator. Taken together, the above crystallographic and enzymatic results therefore imply that, in the case of GarA, the phosphorylated activation loop of PknB serves as a docking (phospho)site for substrate recruitment.

### ***The downstream phospho-independent complex GarA-ODH***

In Actinobacteria, the catalytic domains of components E1o (2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase) and E2o (dihydrolipoamide succinyl transferase) of the ODH complex (homologues to *E. coli* SucA and SucB, respectively) are encoded in a single polypeptide, named OdhA in Corynebacteriaceae (33) and KGD in Mycobacteriaceae (34). E1o (SucA) is a thiamin diphosphate-dependent enzyme that, in addition to its 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase activity (EC 1.2.4.2) as part of the ODH complex, also exhibits 2-oxoglutarate decarboxylase (EC 4.1.1.71) and 2-oxoglutarate:glyoxylate carboligase (EC 2.2.1.5) activities (21, 34-36). In previous work, we characterized the crystal structure of *M. smegmatis* KGD (21, 37) and demonstrated that GarA inhibited the E1o domain, corresponding to KGD residues 361-1227 (KGD<sub>Δ360</sub>) (21). To gain insight into the mode of phospho-independent recognition and inhibition of KGD we crystallized KGD<sub>Δ360</sub> in complex with the FHA domain of GarA (GarA<sub>Δ44</sub>) (Table 1). *M. smegmatis* proteins were used but we maintained *M. tuberculosis* residue numbering for GarA to allow comparison with the PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA complex (the two mycobacterial GarA homologues are 95% identical, see fig. S1, including all residues involved in protein-protein interactions).

The FHA domain of GarA binds to the KGD $_{\Delta 360}$  homodimer with a 2:2 stoichiometry (Fig. 3A). FHA binding promoted no major conformational changes in KGD $_{\Delta 360}$ , because the overall RMSD between the holo (PDB code 2YIC) and FHA-bound structures of wild-type KGD $_{\Delta 360}$  was 0.43 Å for 811 C $\alpha$  atoms. Also, the structure of the *M. smegmatis* FHA domain was structurally identical to that of the PknB-bound *M. tuberculosis* FHA domain, with an overall RMSD of 0.3 Å for 90 equivalent C $\alpha$  atoms. The apical binding surface of the FHA domain is in contact with a strand-connecting loop (residues 586-594) and two outer  $\alpha$ -helices (residues 475-500 and 785-813) of KGD, ~30 Å away from the catalytic center. The protein-protein interaction buries ~2000 Å<sup>2</sup> of the molecular surfaces, and is stabilized through hydrophobic and polar contacts, including several intermolecular salt bridges and hydrogen bonding interactions (Fig. 3B). Partially mimicking a phosphorylated residue, the Asp<sup>795</sup> carboxylate from KGD outer helix 785-813 occupies the phosphate-binding pocket of the FHA domain (Fig. 3C), where it makes a hydrogen-bonding interaction with the hydroxyl group of GarA Ser<sup>95</sup>, a crucial pThr-interacting residue. Two other side chains from the same KGD helix, Arg<sup>794</sup> and Gln<sup>799</sup>, are H-bonded to the backbone carbonyls of GarA residues Gly<sup>114</sup> and Val<sup>92</sup>, respectively, and further stabilize the observed orientation of the helix across the pThr-binding pocket. On the other half of the interface, the KGD loop 586-594 is tightly held in place through several hydrogen bonding interactions of its backbone carbonyl groups with the guanidinium groups of residues Arg<sup>62</sup> and Arg<sup>143</sup> from the FHA domain (Fig. 3D).

The observed KGD-GarA interface is similar to a model proposed for the homologue OdhA-OdhI complex from *C. glutamicum* (38) and can account for OdhA-OdhI crosslinking experiments reported in that study. To further validate the observed interface, we produced three KGD surface mutants: (1) the charged residue Asp<sup>795</sup> that mimics the phosphorylated residue was substituted by alanine, (2) two residues involved in the interface, Ser<sup>484</sup> and Ala<sup>488</sup>,

were substituted by arginine and glutamine, respectively, in order to prevent formation of a stable complex by adding two bulky side chains, and (3) the basic residue Arg<sup>802</sup>, engaged in an intermolecular salt bridge, was substituted by alanine. These mutants retained wild-type decarboxylase activity but differed in their interaction with GarA. Mutants KGD<sub>Δ360,D795A</sub> and KGD<sub>Δ360,S484R,A488Q</sub> were not inhibited by GarA, even at high concentrations (Fig. 3E), likely because the mutations precluded FHA binding. These results highlight the functional importance of the phosphomimetic Asp<sup>795</sup> carboxylate and the primary role of the FHA phosphate-binding pocket in phospho-independent KGD recognition. In contrast, KGD<sub>Δ360,R802A</sub> was more efficiently inhibited by GarA (Fig. 3E) than the wild-type enzyme. The inhibition constant  $K_i$  was displaced from 2.5 μM for wild-type KGD<sub>Δ360</sub> to 0.4 μM for KGD<sub>Δ360,R802A</sub>. The crystal structure of this KGD point mutant in complex with GarA (Table 1) revealed that the absence of the Arg<sup>802</sup> side chain allowed a tighter fitting of the KGD helix 785-813 against the GarA phosphate-binding pocket, thus optimizing protein-protein interactions that compensate for the loss of the intermolecular salt bridge. In agreement with this observation, *C. glutamicum* OdhA has a small side chain (serine) at the equivalent position of KGD Arg<sup>802</sup> and is more efficiently inhibited by OdhI (23), with a  $K_i$  100-fold lower than that of GarA for KGD in *M. smegmatis*.

### ***Dynamic allosteric inhibition of the 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase***

GarA binding to a distal region does not block substrate access to the active site, nor does it promote structural changes in KGD. What then is the mode of action of GarA as a KGD inhibitor? Our previous structural and mutagenesis studies of mycobacterial KGD (21, 37) revealed that formation of the post-decarboxylation covalent reaction intermediate triggered important conformational changes, most notably a global rearrangement of the active-site environment that creates a binding funnel for the acceptor substrate(s). These concerted protein

motions promote the transition from a basal resting state of KGD to a fully active state (39), and are intimately linked to a  $\sim 4\text{\AA}$  shift of a surface-exposed  $\alpha$ -helix (residues 785-813). It is precisely this  $\alpha$ -helix that lies at the center of the GarA-binding interface and contains the phospho-mimetic residue Asp<sup>795</sup> (Fig. 3A). Therefore, formation of the GarA-KGD complex locks the enzyme in its basal resting state by blocking the helical movement and the ensuing structural transition.

Our structural studies of KGD had shown that formation of the post-decarboxylation covalent intermediate can be achieved in the initial resting conformation, before the structural transition occurs (37), and therefore should not be affected by GarA binding. To further investigate this hypothesis, we soaked crystals of the KGD $_{\Delta 360, R802A}$ -GarA $_{\Delta 44}$  complex for long times in 2-oxoglutarate. The crystal structure, refined at 2.4  $\text{\AA}$  resolution (Table 1), showed no major conformational changes in the active site, indicating that the structural transition had not taken place. However, the post-decarboxylation covalent intermediate derived from 2-oxoglutarate was clearly visible in the electron density maps (fig. S7), demonstrating that GarA binding did not prevent the first reaction step. These results further confirm our proposed inhibition mechanism based on blocking protein motions, and are consistent with previous circular dichroism studies of *M. tuberculosis* KGD indicating that GarA inhibited the second half of the enzymatic reaction (39).

Moreover, GarA would be expected to have a differential effect on the reported KGD catalytic activities. By stabilizing the basal conformation of KGD, GarA binding precludes formation of the acceptor substrate-binding sites for the lipoyl and the glyoxylate groups needed to complete the dehydrogenase and carbonylase reactions, respectively. In contrast, the semi-aldehyde species in the decarboxylation reaction is generated by direct proton attack to the post-

decarboxylation covalent intermediate, and should therefore be less affected by GarA. In agreement with this model, at 5  $\mu$ M concentration GarA efficiently inhibited the dehydrogenase reaction (no ODH activity could be detected), but did not totally abolish the decarboxylase reaction, because a residual succinic-semialdehyde production (~27% of the value in the absence of GarA) was measured for KGD $\Delta$ 360 under the same conditions (40). Taken together, the above results demonstrate that unphosphorylated GarA modulates KGD activity through a dynamic allosteric inhibition mechanism.

### ***Structural basis of FHA-protein interactions***

The structures of the phosphorylation-dependent (upstream) and phosphorylation-independent (downstream) GarA complexes described above revealed that, despite the considerable differences in the target proteins, the FHA domain retained its structural integrity and engaged essentially the same molecular surface for protein binding. In the two protein complexes, the interface included the FHA phosphate-binding pocket, defined by the C-terminus of strand  $\beta$ 3 and the loops  $\beta$ 4- $\beta$ 5 and  $\beta$ 6- $\beta$ 7, and a shallow adjacent cleft of positively charged residues from loops  $\beta$ 1- $\beta$ 2 and  $\beta$ 10- $\beta$ 11. As shown by NMR studies of the autoinhibited closed form of GarA (13), this same interface was also used for self-recognition of pThr<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 4). The dual binding specificity of GarA towards phosphorylated and non-phosphorylated proteins is intriguing. Guided by the available structures, we performed surface plasmon resonance experiments to explore the effect of four *M. smegmatis* GarA mutations within the common interface: one involving a central pThr-binding residue, Ser<sup>95</sup>, and three others involving positively charged residues from the adjacent region, Arg<sup>62</sup>, Lys<sup>141</sup> and Arg<sup>143</sup> (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

Our structures and mutational studies underscore the importance of PknB pThr<sup>171</sup> interaction within the GarA phosphate-binding pocket as a primary determinant of PknB binding, whereas the interactions of KGD Asp<sup>795</sup> mimicking pThr are essential for KGD binding. Mutation of the conserved GarA Ser<sup>95</sup> in the phosphate-binding site completely abolished the PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA interaction (Table 2), in full agreement with previous observations that GarA was unable to interact with the dephosphorylated kinases PknB and PknG (18, 20). However, the same GarA substitution S95A had no effect on the KGD dissociation constant (Table 2 and fig. S8). This last result is consistent with a previous observation that this mutation did not affect KGD inhibition (13), but seems to contradict the essentiality of phosphomimetic KGD Asp<sup>795</sup> (Figures 3C and 3E). This apparent discrepancy is probably due to a distinct pattern of interactions involving the Asp<sup>795</sup> carboxylate (compared to a pThr residue) in the phosphate-binding pocket. The carboxylate group is hydrogen bonded to the hydroxyl group of Ser<sup>95</sup> and to a water molecule, which in turn makes strong hydrogen bonds with Asn<sup>117</sup> and main chain backbone atoms of GarA (Fig. 3C). Because it disrupts the whole H-bonding network, the substitution of KGD Asp<sup>795</sup> is therefore expected to have a stronger effect on the binding energy than that of GarA Ser<sup>95</sup>.

In addition to the dissimilarities in the phosphate-binding pocket (occupation by pThr versus Asp), the PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA and KGD-GarA complexes also differ in the interactions on the positively charged face of the FHA domain: substitutions of the GarA basic residues R62A, K141E or R143A in the loops  $\beta$ 1- $\beta$ 2 and  $\beta$ 10- $\beta$ 11 had little or no effect on the PknB<sub>CD</sub> binding affinity (Table 2 and fig. S8). In contrast, these same substitutions were found to considerably affect KGD binding (Table 2), because the basic residues make several ionic interactions with the KGD loop 586-594 (Fig. 3D). In summary, the above observations suggest that recognition of KGD is driven by extensive interactions, not only with the phosphate-binding pocket but

also with the adjacent basic cleft of GarA, which are required to efficiently block KGD protein motions during catalysis, whereas recognition of autophosphorylated PknB (or the GarA N-terminal phosphopeptide in the auto-inhibited closed form (12, 13)) is dominated by interactions of the pThr residue with the canonical phosphate-binding pocket of GarA.

## DISCUSSION

FHA domains are the only type of eukaryotic-like phosphoresidue-binding protein modules so far identified in bacteria, where they fulfill important albeit poorly characterized roles. For instance, in *M. tuberculosis* at least five FHA domain-containing proteins were reported to participate in the STPK-mediated control of essential biological processes such as cell wall synthesis (14, 41), cell division (42) and central metabolism (18). In particular, the GarA-mediated control of a crucial node at the crossroads of carbon and nitrogen metabolism, conserved in and restricted to Actinobacteria (Fig. 1B), arguably represents the bacterial FHA domain-mediated signaling pathway with the most complete molecular description so far. Taken together with previous studies on mycobacterial GarA and corynebacterial OdhI (13, 18, 19, 22-25), our results substantially broaden the functional versatility of the FHA domain, beyond that of a simple pThr-recognition module in cell signaling. In particular, the structures of the upstream and downstream GarA complexes demonstrated how a single FHA domain protein can engage its canonical phosphate-binding pocket in biologically relevant, specific phosphorylation-dependent as well as phosphorylation-independent protein-protein interactions (Fig. 4). Moreover, the same binding region of the FHA domain is likely involved in the interaction of GarA with at least two other metabolic, structurally unrelated enzymes, because the amino acid substitutions S95A in the phosphate-binding pocket and K141E in the

adjacent basic region were shown to abolish GarA binding and regulation of glutamate synthase and NAD-dependent glutamate dehydrogenase in mycobacteria (13).

This dual binding specificity of the FHA domain can be partially accounted for by phosphate mimicry of KGD Asp<sup>795</sup>, which is crucial for complex formation and occupies the phosphate-binding pocket. Indeed, aspartate and glutamate are frequently used as “phosphomimetic” residues to probe the constitutively phosphorylated state in protein phosphoregulation studies, even for structural studies (43, 44). Although in some cases it has been suggested that phosphomimetic mutations might enhance FHA binding (45-47), there have been no previous structural evidence for this and extensive literature rather suggested that phosphomimetic residues might not fit into the binding site of FHA domains or other adaptor proteins ((48) and references therein). Here, the structure of the KGD-GarA complex illustrates a clear example of functional phosphomimetics. The carboxylate group of KGD Asp<sup>795</sup>, a residue essential for complex formation with GarA, occupies a similar position as the pThr side chain in the PknB-GarA complex, with a water molecule filling the cavity left by the missing oxygen atoms of the phosphate to partially restore the hydrogen bonding network (Fig. 3C). These observations demonstrate that phosphomimetic recognition by FHA domains is possible, although in this case we should emphasize that it is favored by additional protein-protein interactions outside the phosphate-binding pocket.

Besides contributing to a better understanding of the GarA-mediated signaling pathway at the molecular level, the individual crystal structures reported here raise important mechanistic issues. For instance, the role of protein dynamics in enzyme function remains poorly understood or difficult to interpret (49). The crystal structures of KGD (21, 37) stressed the importance of protein motions for efficient catalysis and regulation, and that of the GarA-KGD complex now

illustrates a potential approach for using dynamics to modulate function (50) and eventually to design efficient enzyme inhibitors. On the other hand, the structure of the PknB-GarA complex raises puzzling questions on the kinase activation mechanism. Phosphorylation of the activation loop is a hallmark of the active state for many Ser/Thr protein kinases (32, 51), because it usually leads to conformational changes required for catalysis (52). In PknB, phosphorylation of two Thr residues at the activation loop are also required for full kinase activity (53), but the structural and activity studies reported above suggest that the interaction between the pThr residues and the HRD motif is not required to achieve a catalytically competent active site. Instead it appears that phosphorylation of the activation loop serves to generate a docking site for FHA domain-mediated GarA recruitment, which accounts for the high kinase activity against this particular substrate. Further experiments are required to elucidate the molecular mechanisms underpinning kinase activation against other PknB substrates.

In summary, the work reported here revealed structural snapshots of a single FHA domain protein caught in upstream and downstream protein-protein complexes, providing important insights not only into the functional adaptability of these domains in bacterial signaling, but also into kinase activation and unanticipated allosteric dynamic mechanisms of metabolic regulation.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Reagents**

The synthetic 17-mer peptide SDEVTVETTSVFRADFL, corresponding to residues 14-30 of *M. tuberculosis* GarA (*Mt*GarA) was purchased from Thermo Fisher Scientific (purity >98%).

## Cloning and mutagenesis

Genes were amplified by PCR from genomic DNA of *Mycobacterium smegmatis* mc<sup>2</sup> 155 (MSMEG\_5049 for *kgd*, MSMEG\_3647 for *garA*, MSMEG\_4283 for *dlaT* and MSMEG\_0903 for *lpdA*) and *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv (Rv0014c for *pknB*, Rv0243c for *gabD1*, Rv1827 for *garA*), and cloned into pET-28a (Novagen) or pDEST17 (Invitrogen) as previously described (21, 26, 28). Site-directed mutagenesis was performed on pET28a-*MtPknB<sub>CD</sub>* (L33E), pET28a-*MsKGD<sub>Δ360</sub>* (R802A, D795A, S484R/A488Q) and pET28a-*MsGarA* (R62A, S95A, K141E, R143A). All plasmids were verified by DNA sequencing.

## Protein production

The recombinant proteins *MsKGD*, *MsKGD<sub>Δ360</sub>*, *MsGarA*, *MsDlaT*, *MsLpd*, *MtGabD1*, *MtGarA*, and the two FHA domains alone (*MsGarA<sub>Δ44</sub>* used in co-crystallization with *KGD<sub>Δ360</sub>* and *MtGarA<sub>Δ43</sub>* used for the kinase assays shown in Fig. 2F) were over-produced in *E. coli* and purified as previously described (21, 26). *MsGarA* and its mutant versions were also produced in microfermentor units, following established protocols (54). *MtPknB<sub>1-279</sub>* (referred to as *PknB<sub>CD</sub>*) and its mutant version carrying the substitution L33E (*PknB<sub>CD,L33E</sub>*) were expressed for 15 h at 22°C with 100 μM IPTG isopropyl-1-thio-βD-galactopyranoside. Both proteins were purified using the same protocol. *E. coli* cells were harvested by centrifugation, re-suspended in lysis buffer (50 mM NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> pH 8, 500 mM NaCl, 5% glycerol, 25 mM imidazole, 1 mM DTT) supplemented with Complete protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche) and sonicated. After centrifugation, the supernatant was loaded onto a 5 ml HisTrap HP column (GE Healthcare) and the His-tagged protein was purified applying a linear imidazole gradient (25–500 mM). Next, the His<sub>6</sub> tag was removed by incubating for 18 hours at 18 °C in the presence of His<sub>6</sub>-tagged TEV protease (55) at a 1/30 ratio (w/w) in buffer 25 mM Hepes pH 8, 150 mM NaCl,

5% glycerol, 1 mM DTT, followed by separation on a Ni-NTA agarose column (Qiagen). Then the protein was further purified by size-exclusion chromatography on a Superdex 200 column (GE Healthcare) equilibrated in 25 mM Hepes pH 8, 150 mM NaCl, 5% glycerol, 1 mM DTT. Fractions corresponding to the PknB peaks, as confirmed by SDS-PAGE, were later pooled and concentrated up to 40 mg/ml, flash-frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C.

All proteins were quantified by using the molar absorption coefficient predicted from the aminoacid sequence by the ProtParam tool (<http://web.expasy.org/protparam/>).

### **Enzyme activity assays**

Kinase activity assays were performed in 96-well plates. Each activity measurement was performed in a final volume of 20  $\mu$ l, containing 50 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.4, 0.1% v/v 2-mercaptoethanol, 0.01% v/v Brij-35, 2 mM  $MnCl_2$ , 100  $\mu$ M [ $\gamma^{32}P$ ]ATP (5-50 cpm/pmol), and 330  $\mu$ M 17-mer peptide or 25  $\mu$ M *MtGarA* as substrate. In addition, the kinase assays shown in Fig. 2F were done in the absence or presence of 92  $\mu$ M *MtGarA* $_{\Delta 43}$ . The enzyme concentration in the assays was 0.2-5  $\mu$ M and 3-12 nM when using the 17-mer peptide or *MtGarA* as substrates, respectively. The kinase reactions were started by the addition of 4  $\mu$ l [ $\gamma^{32}P$ ]ATP- $Mn^{+2}$  and were performed at room temperature. The reactions were stopped by the addition of phosphoric acid and 4  $\mu$ l of each reaction were spotted on P81 phosphocellulose papers (Whatman) using the epMotion 5070 (Eppendorf) workstation. The papers were washed in 0.01% phosphoric acid, dried, then measured and analyzed using a PhosphorImager (FLA-9000 Starion, Fujifilm). Each reaction was performed in duplicates (<10% variation) and each assay was performed at least twice (<20% variation). In all cases, specific activity values were derived from reactions performed employing three different enzyme concentrations within the indicated ranges (<20% variation), verifying a linear dependence of activity with kinase concentration. The proportion of 17-mer peptide or *MtGarA* consumed in the reactions was

lower than 10% and 30%, respectively. *MtGarA* consumption was verified to be linear in time up to 50% its initial concentration. Under the experimental conditions employed to test phosphorylation of the 17-mer peptide or *MtGarA*, Pkn<sub>BCD</sub> or Pkn<sub>BCD,L33E</sub> autophosphorylation represented less than 5% of the total signal. The measured signal was at least five times higher than the lecture on the background.

Determinations of 2-oxoglutarate decarboxylase and 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase (ODH) activities were carried out as previously described (21). Briefly, for the decarboxylase activity reactions contained 2  $\mu$ M *MsKGD* <sub>$\Delta$ 360</sub>, 1-3 mM 2-oxoglutarate, 0.2 mM ThDP, 1 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 0.55-1.1  $\mu$ M *MtGabD1*, 1-2 mM NADP<sup>+</sup> in 50 mM potassium phosphate, pH 6.5. Reactions were started by the addition of 2-oxoglutarate at 37°C, and initial rates were calculated during the linear phase of the reaction (10-20 min) following 340 nm absorbance using a microplate reader. For measuring ODH activity, the reaction contained 1-3 mM 2-oxoglutarate, 1 mM CoA-SH, 0.2 mM ThDP, 1 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 2  $\mu$ M *MsKGD*, 4  $\mu$ M *MsDlaT*, 0.5  $\mu$ M *MsLpd*, 1-2 mM 3-acetylpyridine dinucleotide (AcNAD<sup>+</sup>) in 50 mM potassium phosphate pH 6.5. AcNAD<sup>+</sup> was used instead of NAD<sup>+</sup> in order to prevent enzyme inhibition by NADH. Reactions were started by the addition of 2-oxoglutarate at 37°C, and initial rates were calculated during the linear phase of the reaction (10-20 min). When required, *MsGarA* was diluted in PBS and added to a final concentration ranging from 0.02 to 10  $\mu$ M, and AcCoA to a final concentration ranging from 0.01 to 4 mM. The rate of AcNAD<sup>+</sup> reduction was calculated by spectrophotometry based on the absorption coefficient of AcNADH, H<sup>+</sup> ( $\epsilon_{340\text{nm}} = 6220 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ). When appropriate, *MsGarA* was diluted in PBS and added to the assay mixture at 5  $\mu$ M, unless otherwise stated. Experiments were performed in triplicate.

### **Isothermal titration calorimetry**

*MtGarA* binding to PknB<sub>CD</sub> or PknB<sub>CD,L33E</sub> were assayed by using the high precision VP-ITC system (MicroCal Inc.) with the following parameters: the ITC cell (1.4 ml) contained 10  $\mu$ M of *MtPknB*, preincubated with 2  $\mu$ M ATP in 25 mM Hepes pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM DTT and the syringe (150  $\mu$ l) contained 250  $\mu$ M *MtGarA* in the same buffer. Sample solutions were thoroughly degassed under vacuum and each titration was performed at 15 °C by injections of 10  $\mu$ l every 210 seconds using a 290 r.p.m. rotating syringe. Raw heat signal collected with a 16 s filter was corrected for the dilution heat and normalized to the concentration of ligand injected. Data were fit to a bimolecular model using the Origin software provided by the manufacturer. ITC experiments were performed at least twice to ensure reproducibility. A representative experiment is shown in fig. S3, from which the reported thermodynamic parameters have been calculated.

### **Analytical ultracentrifugation**

Sedimentation coefficients were determined at 20°C, using a Beckman Coulter XL-I centrifuge equipped with an AN60-Ti rotor equipped with Rayleigh interference detection. Samples were centrifuged for 17 h at 42 000 rpm and profiles were recorded every 5 min. Sedimentation scans were analyzed by the continuous size distribution procedure  $c(S)$  with the program Sedfit 15.01 (56). All  $c(S)$  distributions were calculated with a fitted frictional ratio  $f/f_0$  and a maximum entropy regularization procedure with a confidence level of 0.68. Theoretical sedimentation coefficients were calculated from the atomic coordinates using HYDROPRO (57), and compared to the experimental sedimentation coefficients obtained from ultracentrifugation analysis.

### **Surface plasmon resonance**

SPR measurements were performed at 25 °C on an NTA sensor chip using a Biacore 2000 instrument (GE Healthcare) equilibrated with 25 mM Hepes pH 8, 150 mM NaCl, 50  $\mu$ M EDTA and 0.005% Tween 20 (running buffer). The sensor chip was activated by injecting 0.5 mM NiCl<sub>2</sub> followed by the capture of the His-tagged proteins *MsKGD* full length and *MtPknBCD* on two independent channels. The reference flow cell was prepared by the same procedure in absence of protein. Various concentrations of wild-type *MsGarA*, or the single point mutants R61A, S94A, K140E and R142A (referred to in the text as R62A, S95A, K141E and R143A, respectively, to maintain consistency with *MtGarA* residue numbering) were injected onto the surfaces at a flow rate of 50  $\mu$ l.min<sup>-1</sup> and the binding signals monitored. Protein dissociation was realized by injecting the running buffer and the surface was regenerated by injecting imidazole 0.25 M, followed by EDTA 0.35 M and SDS 0.1% before the next cycle. Control flow cell sensorgrams were subtracted from the ligand flow cell sensorgrams and averaged buffer injections were subtracted from analyte sensorgrams. Response at equilibrium (Req) were obtained directly from the plateau region of the sensorgrams. The saturation curves obtained by plotting Req versus the analyte concentration were fitted with a steady state model to obtain the apparent equilibrium dissociation constant K<sub>D</sub>, using the BIAevaluation 4.2 software (GE Healthcare).

### **Crystallization and data collection**

Crystallization screenings were carried out using the sitting-drop vapor diffusion method and a Mosquito nanolitre-dispensing crystallization robot (TTP Labtech); hits were improved by hand-made hanging drops in 24-well plates at the same temperature. Optimized conditions for crystal growth of the different protein complexes (protein concentrations of 20-25 mg/ml, molar ratios of 1:1) are as follows: (i) *MtPknBL33E* - *MtGarA*, 100 mM Hepes, 4 % w/v PEG400, 2 M (NH<sub>4</sub>)<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, 4 mM AMP-PCP, pH 7.5; (ii) *MsKGD* <sub>$\Delta$ 360</sub> - *MsGarA* <sub>$\Delta$ 44</sub>: 50% MPD, 100 mM MES,

2 mM ThDP, 5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, pH 6.5; and (iii) *MsKGD*<sub>Δ360,R802A</sub> - *MsGarA*<sub>Δ44</sub>: 47% MPD, 100 mM NaHepes, 2 mM ThDP, 5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, pH 7.5. The enamine-ThDP reaction intermediate for KGD in the presence of GarA was obtained by soaking crystals of the *MsKGD*<sub>Δ360,R802A</sub> - *MsGarA*<sub>Δ44</sub> (grown as described above) with 20 mM 2-oxoglutarate for 8 minutes prior to freezing.

X-ray diffraction data were collected from single crystals at 100 K using synchrotron radiation at beamlines Proxima 1, Synchrotron Soleil (Saint-Aubin, France) and at ID14-1, ESRF (Grenoble, France). Data processing was carried out with programs XDS (58) and AIMLESS (59).

### **Structure determination and refinement**

The crystal structures of all protein complexes were solved by molecular replacement techniques using either the *MtPknB* catalytic domain (PDB code 1O6Y) or the apo form of *MsKGD*<sub>Δ360</sub> (PDB code 2YIC) as search probes with the program PHASER (60). The bound FHA domain in all structures, as well as the cofactor ThDP (for the KGD complexes) or the nucleotide AMP-PCP (for the PknB complex), were clearly visible in Fourier difference maps and could be manually traced during refinement. All crystallographic models were refined through iterative cycles of manual model building with COOT (61) and reciprocal space refinement with BUSTER (62). Due to important conformational changes in the PknB kinase core, the entire N-lobe was removed during the first refinement rounds and gradually rebuilt through iterative cycles of refinement and manual model building. The structure was validated through the Molprobity server (<http://molprobity.biochem.duke.edu>). Figures were generated and rendered with Pymol 1.5.0.2. (Schrödinger, LLC).

## Supplementary Materials

Fig. S1. Conserved amino acid sequences of GarA homologues in selected Actinobacteria.

Fig. S2. Continuous sedimentation coefficient distribution analysis of the PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA complex.

Fig. S3. Isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC) characterization of the interaction between autophosphorylated PknB<sub>CD</sub> and GarA.

Fig. S4. The N-terminal GarA extension occupies a similar position in different GarA structures.

Fig. S5. Conserved mode of phosphopeptide recognition in different *M. tuberculosis* FHA domains.

Fig. S6. Detailed structure of the PknB activation loop bound to GarA.

Fig. S7. Formation of the enamine-ThDP covalent adduct in the presence of GarA.

Fig. S8. Surface plasmon resonance (SPR) studies of protein-protein interactions.

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## FIGURE LEGENDS

**Fig. 1. GarA regulates glutamate metabolism in actinobacteria.** (A) GarA consists of a C-terminal FHA domain and an N-terminal peptide extension that contains two adjacent phosphorylatable threonine residues: Thr<sup>21</sup> and Thr<sup>22</sup> in *M. tuberculosis* GarA (18, 20) (equivalent to Thr<sup>14</sup> and Thr<sup>15</sup> in the *C. glutamicum* homologue OdhI (17)). PknG phosphorylates the first Thr in each protein, whereas PknB targets the second Thr residue in each protein. (B) The mycobacterial signaling pathway involving GarA, which functions as a phospho-dependent (ON/OFF) molecular switch (26). In the ON state, nonphosphorylated GarA represses or stimulates the activity of three distinct metabolic enzymes and redirects the metabolic flux (thick grey lines) towards the synthesis of glutamate. GarA binding to its downstream targets involves pThr-independent recognition by the GarA FHA domain, which is rare among FHA domains. Phosphorylation of GarA by PknG or PknB triggers an intramolecular interaction, resulting in a closed conformation that blocks the pThr-binding site and switches off the regulatory properties of GarA. Dephosphorylation of GarA by PstP, the conserved transmembrane protein serine-threonine phosphatase in Actinobacteria, is assumed based on PstP-mediated dephosphorylation of OdhI in *C. glutamicum* (63). ODH, 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase; GS, glutamate synthase; GDH, glutamate dehydrogenase; OG, 2-oxoglutarate; Glu, glutamate; Gln, glutamine; SucCoA, succinyl-Coenzyme A.

**Fig. 2. Structure of the upstream ternary complex GarA-PknB-nucleotide.** (A) Overall view of the GarA-PknB<sub>CD,L33E</sub> complex. The complex was crystallized in the presence of the non-hydrolysable ATP analog AMP-PCP. GarA is shown in yellow, the PknB kinase activation loop in violet, and the two PknB helices involved in the interface in green. The non-hydrolysable ATP analog and the residues involved in Thr-phosphate binding are depicted as sticks. (B) The N-terminal GarA peptide (residues 26-34) mediates the interaction between a patch of basic residues on the FHA domain surface (Arg<sup>62</sup>, Arg<sup>143</sup>) and the PknB helix  $\alpha$ G. (C) Close view of the pThr<sup>171</sup>-binding site, with all phosphate oxygens involved in H-bonding interactions. (D) Structural differences in the PknB helix  $\alpha$ C between the PknB-GarA complex (green) and the back-to-back PknB homodimer (blue, PDB code 1O6Y). (E) Kinase activity of PknB<sub>CD</sub> and PknB<sub>CD,L33A</sub> on full-length GarA (orange) and on the 17-residue peptide substrate (green). (F) Kinase activity of PknB<sub>CD</sub> and PknB<sub>CD,L33A</sub> on the peptide substrate in the absence (light green) and presence (dark green) of the GarA FHA domain. In panels E and F, values are the mean of three independent measurements (N=3) and error bars represent the SEM.

**Fig. 3. The downstream GarA FHA domain (GarA $\Delta$ 44)-E1o (KGD $\Delta$ 360) complex.** (A) Two GarA FHA domain molecules (yellow) bind the outer helices (475-500) and (785-813) of the E1o homodimer (pink). The cofactor thiamine diphosphate (ThDP) at the E1o active site is shown in sphere representation. (B) Overall view of the protein-protein interface, showing the molecular surface of KGD color-coded according to electrostatic charge, and GarA FHA domain in ribbon representation. The electrostatic surface is represented color-coded from acidic (red) to basic (blue). All protein residues involved in intermolecular H bonds are labelled (black label for GarA residues, white labels for surface KGD residues). (C) Close view of the pThr-binding pocket showing atomic interactions of the phospho-mimetic residue Asp<sup>795</sup>. Color-code as in panel (A). (D) Hydrogen bonds between GarA FHA domain Arg<sup>62</sup> and Arg<sup>143</sup> (in yellow) and main chain carbonyl groups from the KGD loop 586-594 (in violet, side chains are omitted for clarity). (E) GarA FHA domain inhibition of wild-type KGD $\Delta$ 360 (red) and three interface mutants (D759A: black open circles, S484A/A488R: black dots, R802A: green). Values are the mean of three independent measurements (N=3); SEM values (not shown) are in the range 0.1-0.5.

**Fig. 4.** The GarA FHA domain employs the same binding region (colored molecular surface) in distinct functional contexts. The structures shown are those of the closed conformation of autoinhibited GarA (left panel), the GarA-PknB<sub>CD,L33A</sub> complex (central panel) and the GarA<sub>Δ44</sub>-KGD<sub>Δ360</sub> complex (right panel). In all cases, the FHA domain is shown in a similar orientation.

**Table 1.** Data collection and refinement statistics

<b>Data collection</b>	<b>PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA</b>	<b>KGD<sub>Δ360</sub>- GarA<sub>Δ44</sub></b>	<b>KGD<sub>Δ360,R802A</sub>- GarA<sub>Δ44</sub></b>	<b>KGD<sub>Δ360,R802A</sub>- GarA<sub>Δ44</sub> 2-oxoglutarate soak</b>
Synchrotron beamline	SOLEIL Proxima 1	SOLEIL Proxima 1	ESRF ID14-1	SOLEIL Proxima 1
Wavelength (Å)	0.9763	0.9800	0.9334	0.9801
Space group	P2 <sub>1</sub> 2 <sub>1</sub> 2 <sub>1</sub>	C2 2 2 <sub>1</sub>	P2 <sub>1</sub> 2 <sub>1</sub> 2 <sub>1</sub>	C2 2 2 <sub>1</sub>
Cell dimensions <i>a, b, c</i> (Å)	69.31, 70.46, 188.60	141.25, 167.85, 102.81	95.75, 143.15, 167.11	141.27, 168.06, 101.57
$\alpha, \beta, \gamma$ (°)	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90
Resolution (Å)	38.85 – 2.37 (2.46 – 2.37)	47.83 – 2.15 (2.20 – 2.15)	48.15 – 2.20 (2.24 – 2.20)	84.03 – 2.40 (2.45 – 2.40)
$R_{\text{merge}}$	0.081 (0.439)	0.062 (0.747)	0.089 (0.746)	0.075 (0.840)
$I / \sigma(I)$	10.5 (2.4)	16.6 (2.2)	13.2 (1.6)	13.9 (2.2)
Completeness (%)	96.3 (78.9)	98.9 (98.4)	96.7 (69.1)	98.0 (100.0)
CC(1/2)	0.995 (0.863)	0.999 (0.760)	0.997 (0.716)	0.992 (0.810)
Redundancy	4.6 (4.0)	5.0 (5.1)	5.9 (2.6)	4.7 (5.0)
<b>Refinement</b>				
Resolution (Å)	2.37	2.15	2.20	2.40
No. reflections	36656	65660	112917	46357
$R_{\text{work}} / R_{\text{free}}$ (%)	22.0 / 23.4	16.3 / 19.1	19.5 / 21.9	19.2 / 21.9
No. atoms				
Protein	5631	7167	14168	7094
Ligand/ions	148	28	56	40
Solvent	228	356	454	159
Average B-factors				
Protein	67.8	56.7	35.4	72.8
Ligand/ions	65.4	34.0	22.8	62.8
Solvent	60.7	49.0	29.7	58.2
R.m.s deviations				
Bond lengths (Å)	0.008	0.010	0.010	0.010
Bond angles (°)	0.99	0.99	1.01	1.08
<b>PDB #</b>	<b>6I2P</b>	<b>6I2Q</b>	<b>6I2R</b>	<b>6I2S</b>

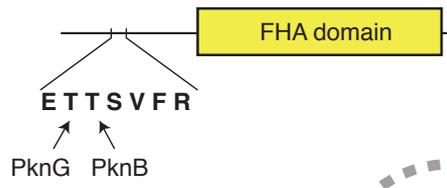
Values in parenthesis are for the highest resolution shell

**Table 2.** *MtPknBCD* catalytic domain and *MsKGD $\Delta$ 360* binding of different *MsGarA* point mutants. Values represent  $K_D \pm SE$  from a representative experiment (fig. S8) out of 3 or more independent experiments.

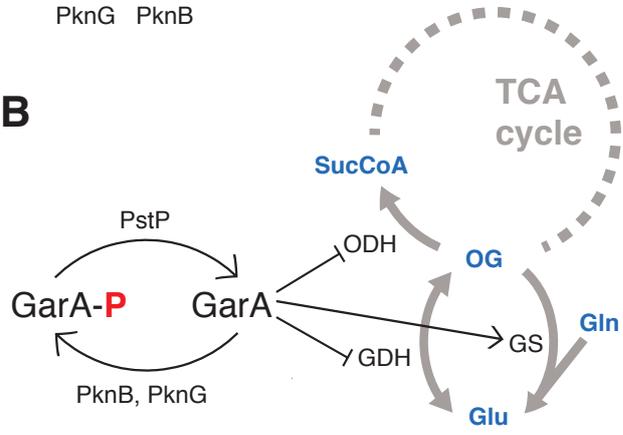
<b>GarA</b>	<b>KGD <math>K_D</math> (<math>\mu</math>M)</b>	<b>PknBCD <math>K_D</math> (<math>\mu</math>M)</b>
Wild-type	$1.92 \pm 0.15$	$12.2 \pm 1.0$
R62A	n.d.	$14.7 \pm 1.5$
S95A	$1.89 \pm 0.11$	n.d.
K141E	n.d.	$10.8 \pm 0.8$
R143A	n.d.	$12.4 \pm 1.1$

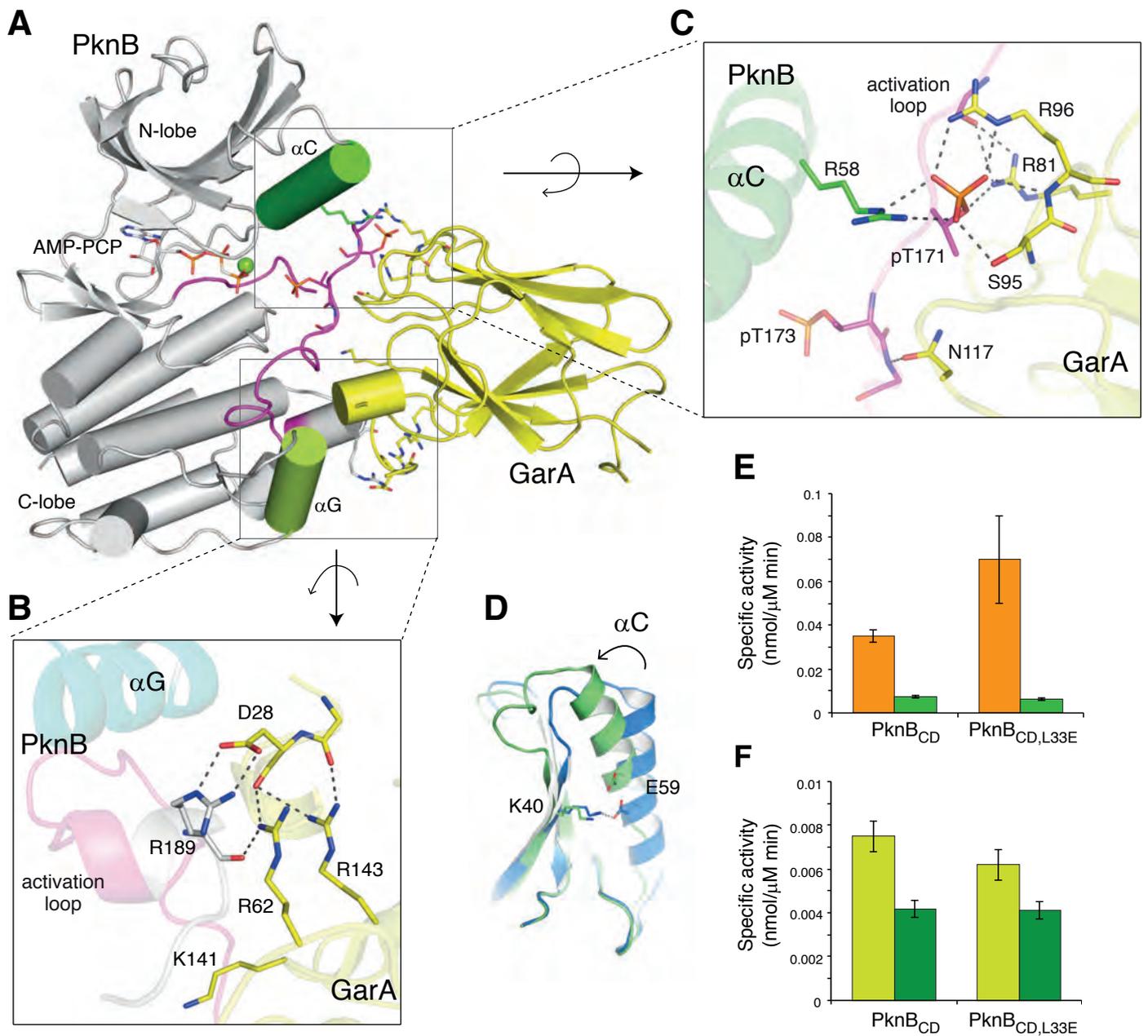
n.d.: not determined (no reliable fit)

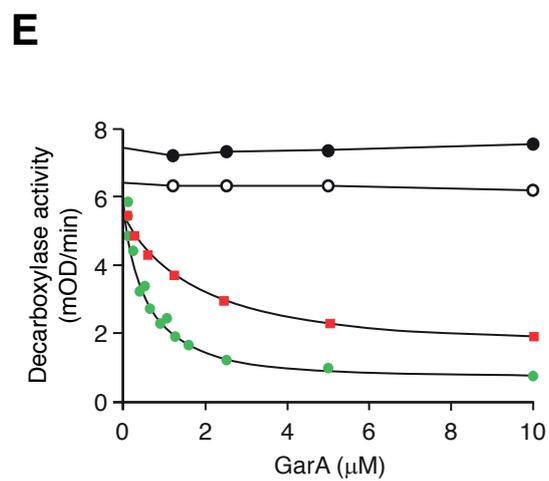
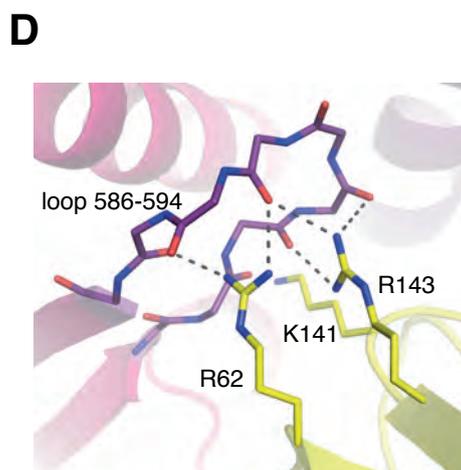
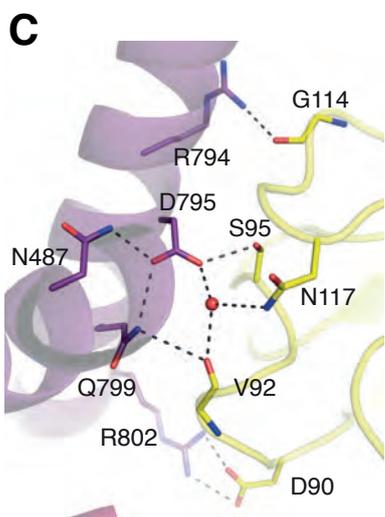
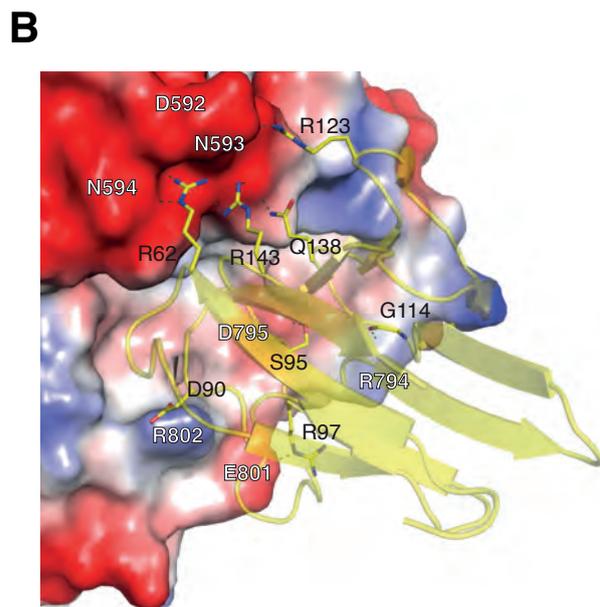
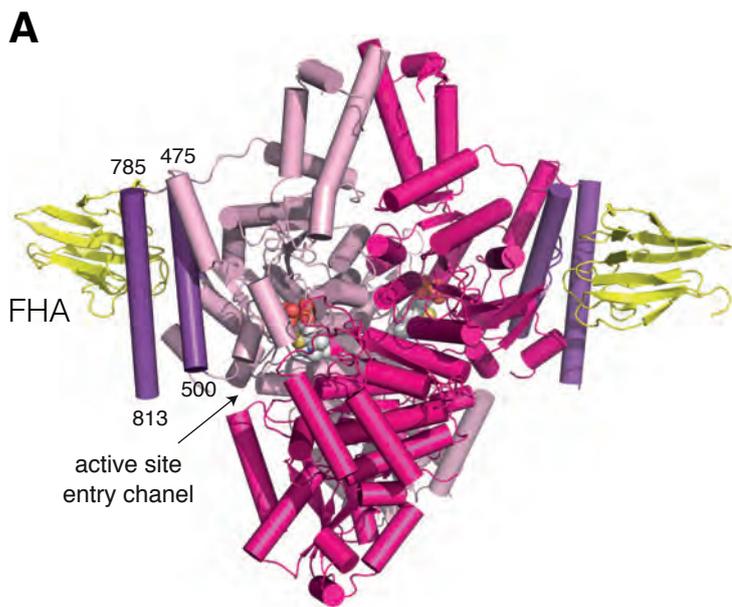
**A**

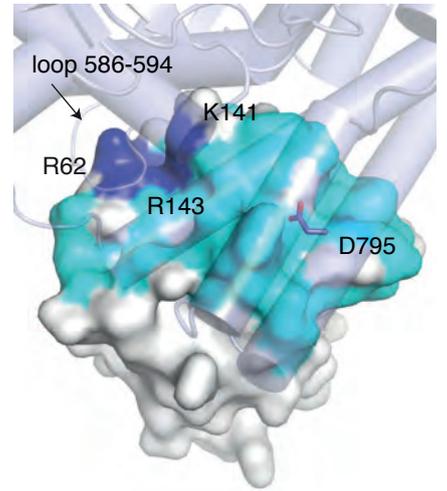
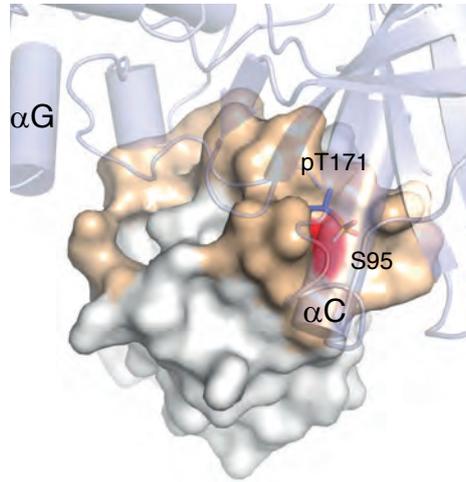
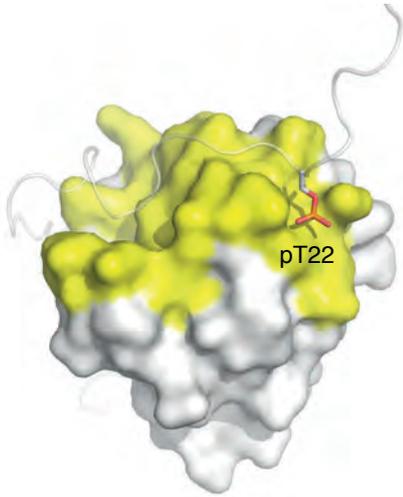


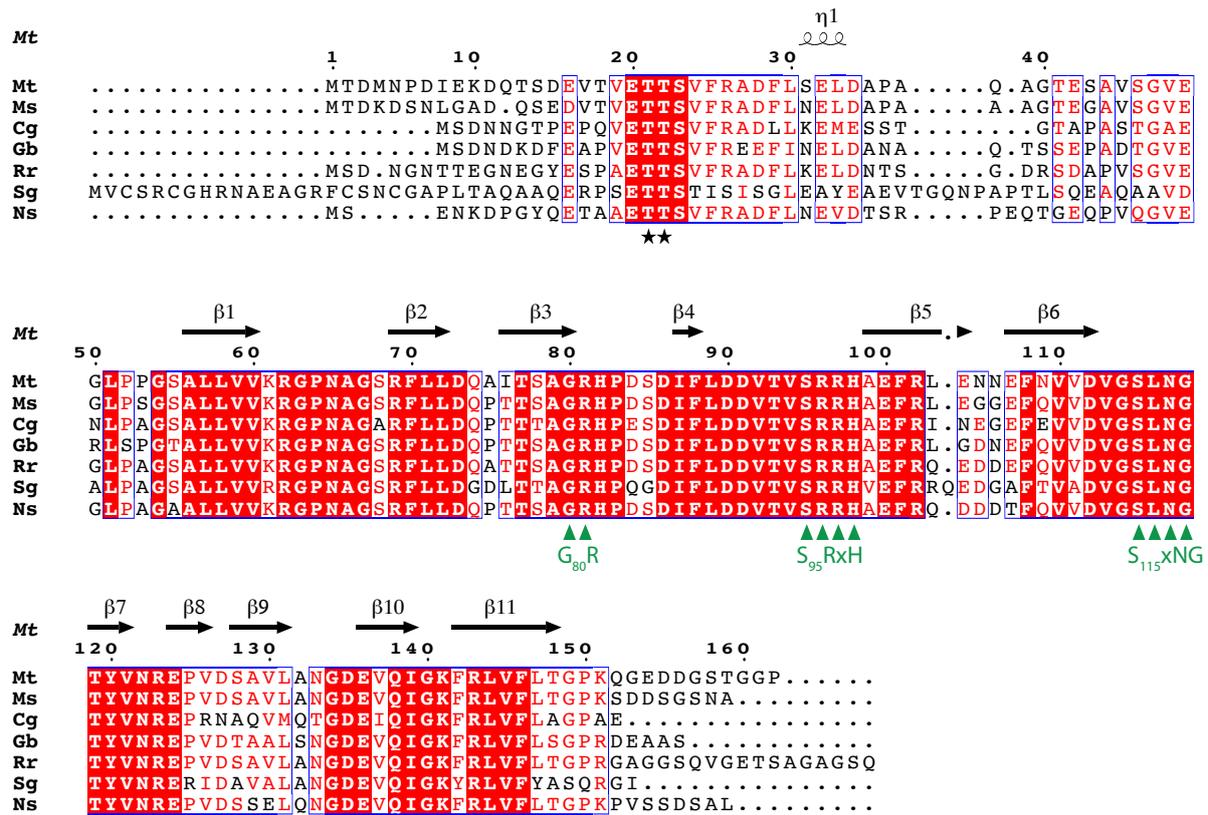
**B**



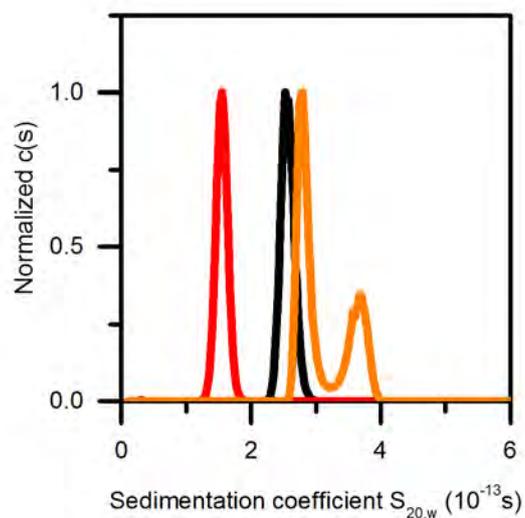




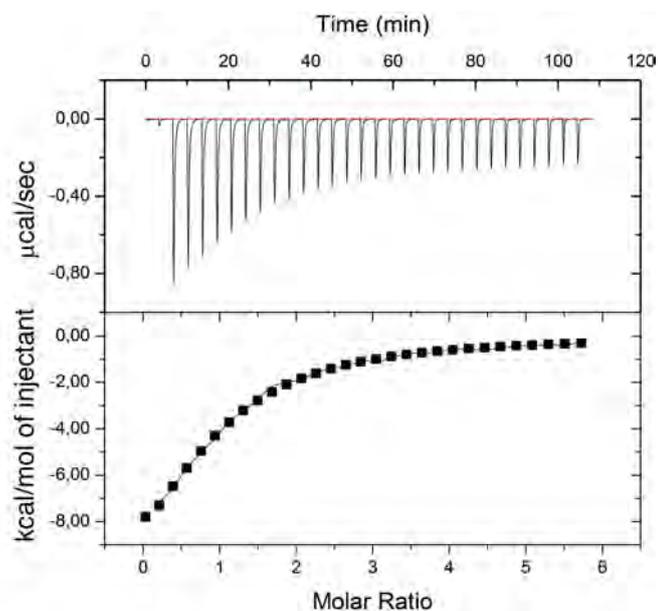




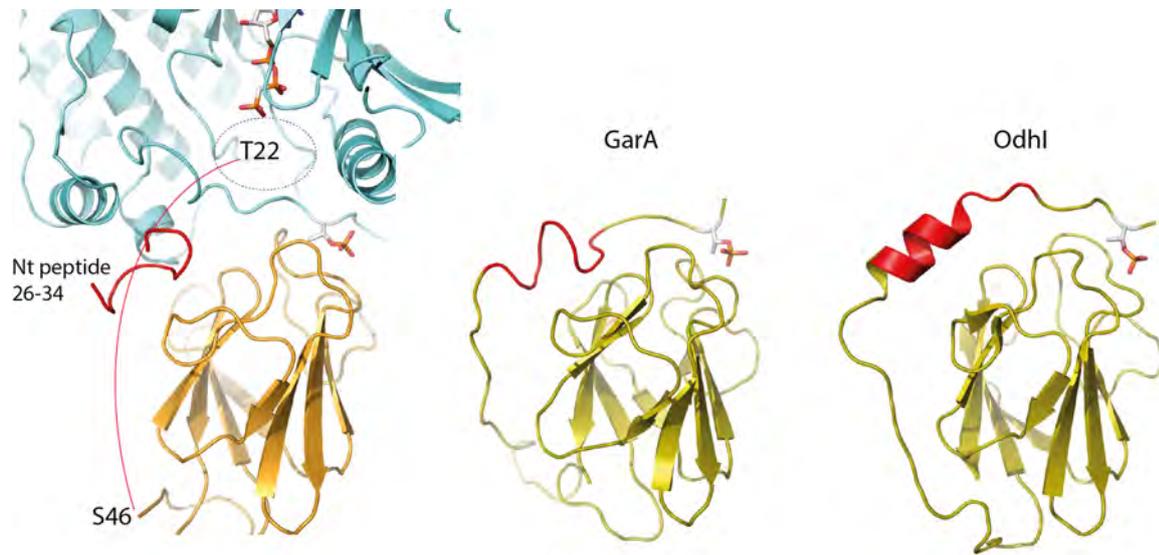
**Fig. S1. Conserved amino acid sequences of GarA homologues in selected Actinobacteria.** The secondary structure elements of the *M. tuberculosis* GarA structure are indicated above the respective sequence. The phosphorylation sites within the ETTSVFR motif (stars), as well as the three conserved motifs in FHA domains (green) are shown under the alignment. Mt, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*; Ms, *Mycobacterium smegmatis*; Cg, *Corynebacterium glutamicum* (OdhI); Gb, *Gordonia bronchialis*; Rr, *Rhodococcus rhodnii*; Sg, *Streptomyces griseus*; Ns, *Nocardia seriolae*.



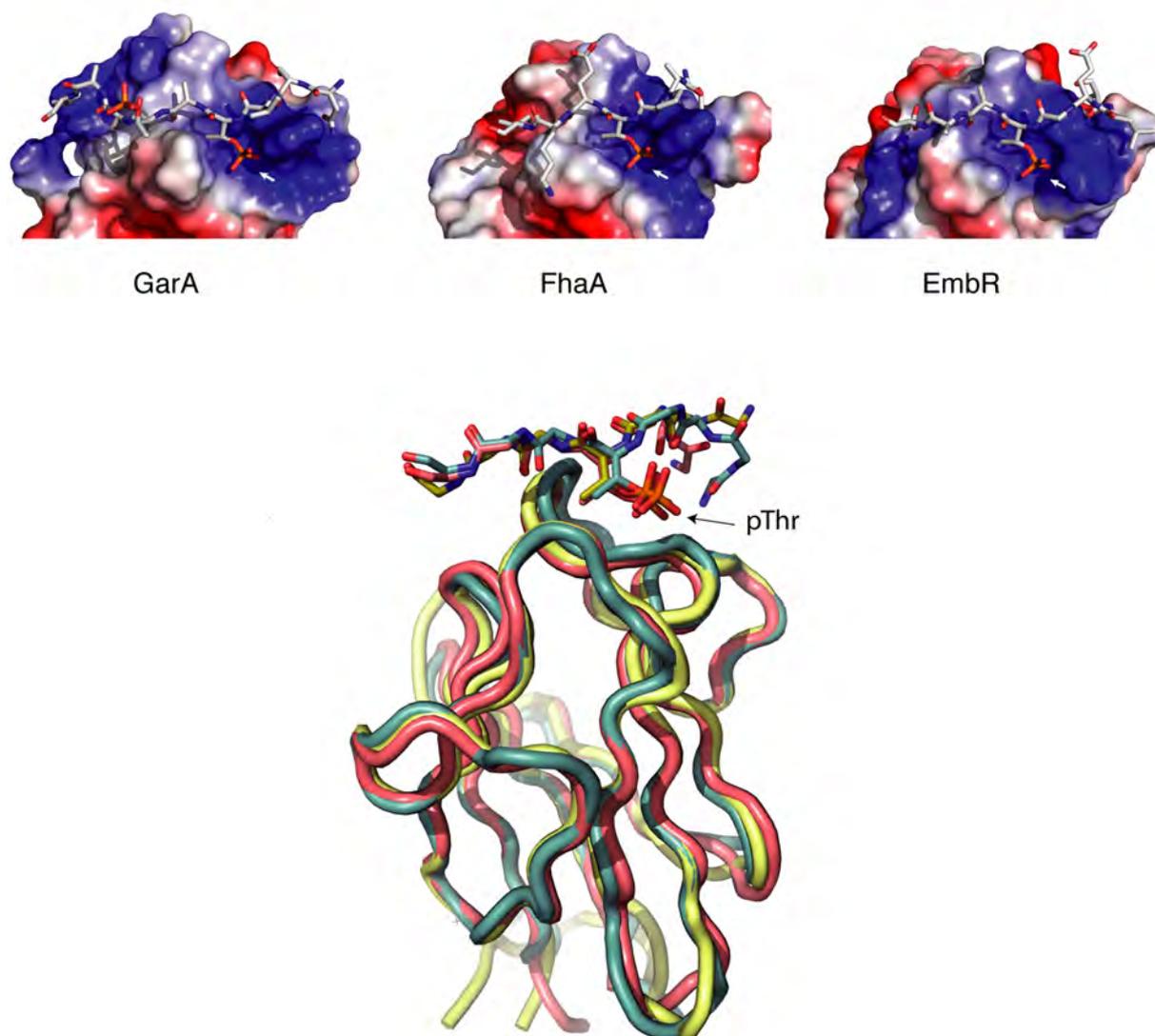
**Fig. S2. Continuous sedimentation coefficient distribution analysis of the PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA complex.** PknB (black curve) behaves as a monomer at  $\sim 1$  mg/ml in solution, with a sedimentation coefficient of  $2.6 \pm 0.1$  S and a frictional ratio of 1.3. GarA (red) also behaves as a monomer at the same concentration, with a sedimentation coefficient of  $1.6 \pm 0.1$  S and a frictional ratio of 1.4. After mixing the two proteins (orange), two species were observed: one with a sedimentation coefficient of  $2.8 \pm 0.1$  S (corresponding to excess monomeric PknB<sub>CD</sub>), and the other with a sedimentation coefficient of  $3.6 \pm 0.1$  S, corresponding to a PknB<sub>CD</sub>-GarA 1:1 heterodimer. The observed sedimentation values of PknB<sub>CD</sub> and GarA match those calculated by hydrodynamic modelling of the crystallographic coordinates. The figure shows a representative experiment out of 3 independent replicates.



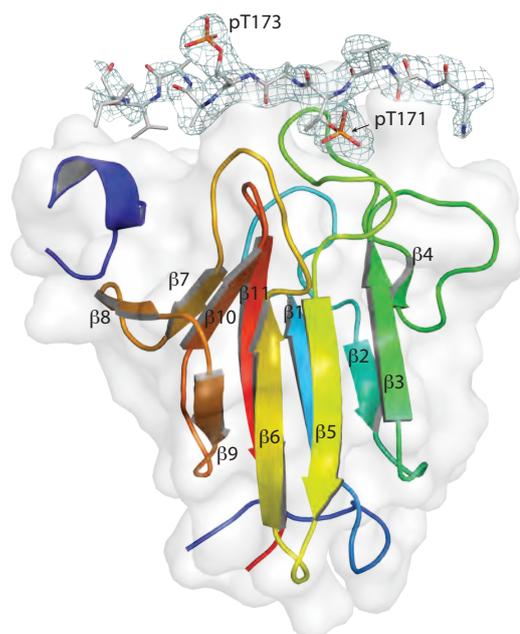
**Fig. S3. Isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC) characterization of the interaction between autophosphorylated PknBCD and GarA.** The figure shows representative ITC data (out of 3 or more independent experiments), from which the parameters of the reaction were estimated. PknBCD binds GarA with a  $K_d$  of 8  $\mu\text{M}$  in an enthalpy-driven reaction (stoichiometry ( $N$ ) =  $0.9 \pm 0.1$ ,  $\Delta H = -14.9 \pm 0.9$  kcal/mol,  $T\Delta S = -8.2 \pm 0.7$  kcal/mol).



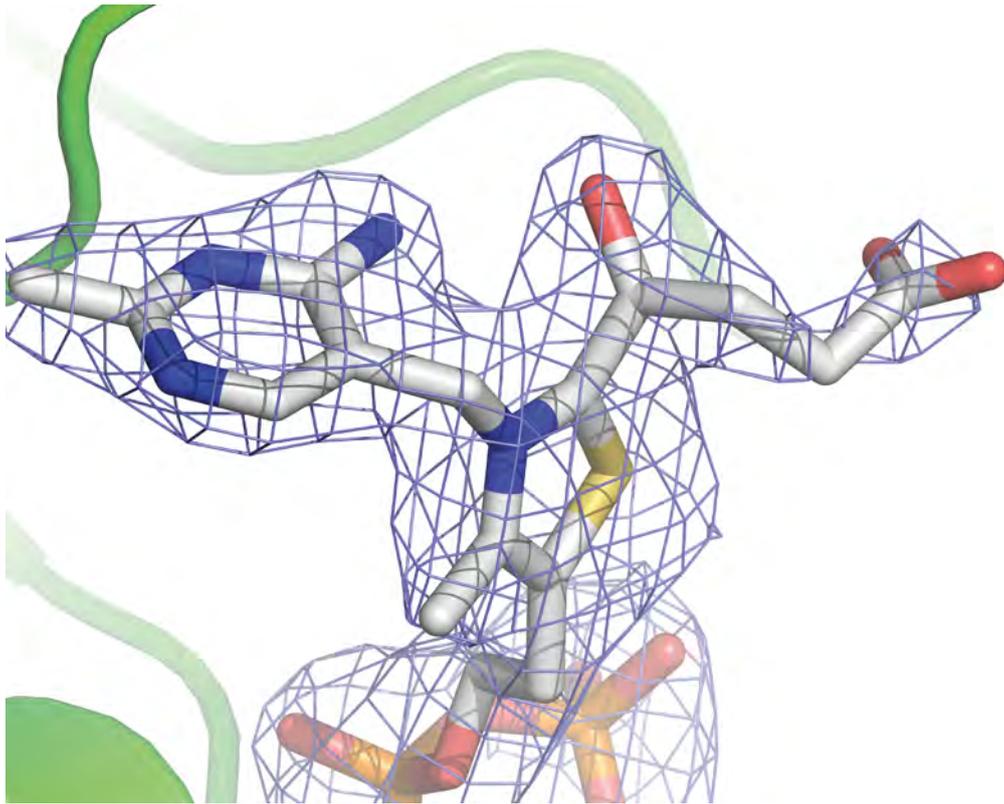
**Fig. S4. The N-terminal GarA extension occupies a similar position in different GarA structures.** GarA residues 26-34 (shown in red) interacts with the same region of the FHA domain in the PknBCD-GarA complex (left panel), autoinhibited *M. tuberculosis* GarA ((13), center panel) and autoinhibited *C. glutamicum* OdhI ((12), right panel). This position would be compatible with occupation of the active site by the phosphorylation target Thr<sup>22</sup>, assuming an extended conformation of the N-terminus of GarA (red arc in left panel).



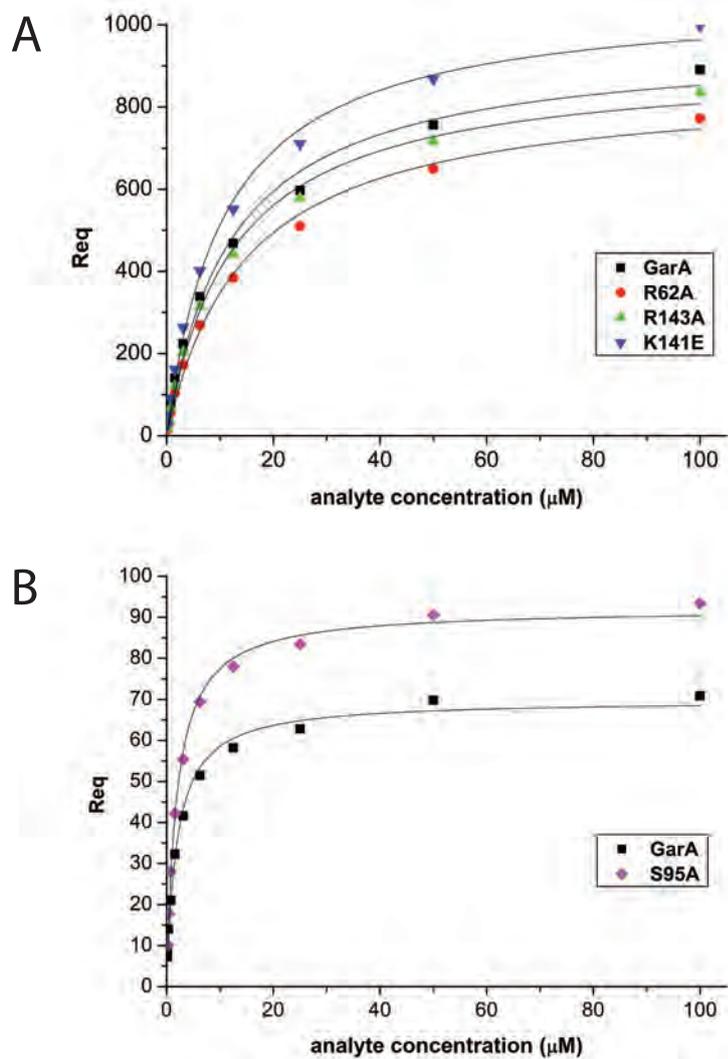
**Fig. S5. Conserved mode of phosphopeptide recognition in different *M. tuberculosis* FHA domains.** The top panel shows the structures of the GarA FHA domain in complex with the PknB activation loop, FhaA in complex with phosphopeptide (64), and the EmbR FHA domain in complex with a non-specific phosphopeptide (65). The electrostatic surface of the FHA domain in all cases is color-coded from acidic (red) to basic (blue) and the phosphopeptide is shown in stick representation. A white arrow indicates the position of the phosphothreonine side-chain. The bottom panel shows the superposition of the three FHA domain structures, GarA is shown in yellow, FhaA in light pink and EmbR in cyan. For clarity, only the phosphopeptide backbone and the pThr residues are shown.



**Fig. S6. Detailed structure of the PknB activation loop bound to GarA.** The FHA domain is shown in cartoon and molecular surface representation, secondary structure labels ( $\beta 1$  to  $\beta 11$ ) correspond to those shown in Figure S1. The activation loop is shown in stick representation, the electron density ( $2mF_o-F_c$ ) map is contoured at  $1.0 \sigma$  and the two pThr residues are labelled.



**Fig. S7. Formation of the enamine-ThDP covalent adduct in the presence of GarA.** The electron density ( $2mF_o - F_c$ ) map contoured at  $1.0 \sigma$  demonstrating the formation of the covalent intermediate in crystals of KGD-GarA complex upon soaking with 2-oxoglutarate.



**Fig. S8. Surface plasmon resonance (SPR) studies of protein-protein interactions.** The plots show representative SPR responses at the steady state of immobilized PknBCD (**A**) and KGD (**B**) versus different concentrations of the analyte (wild-type *MsGarA* or the indicated point mutants). The derived apparent equilibrium dissociation constants are given in Table 2, where the values represent the  $K_d \pm \text{SEM}$  from a representative experiment out of 3 or more independent replicates.