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TUMOR NECROSIS FACTOR- α SYNERGIZES WITH IFN- γ IN MEDIATING KILLING OF *Leishmania major* THROUGH THE INDUCTION OF NITRIC OXIDE

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CBA mice develop cutaneous lesions when infected with *Leishmania major*. The disease development was significantly reduced by injecting into the lesion a combination of rIFN- γ and rTNF- α . The doses of IFN- γ and TNF- α used were suboptimal in that either cytokine alone did not have any effect. The therapeutic effect of IFN- γ and TNF- α in vivo is reflected in their ability to activate macrophages to kill the intracellular parasites in vitro. The macrophage leishmanicidal activity induced by TNF- α and IFN- γ can be completely inhibited by a specific inhibitor (L-N^o monomethyl arginine) of nitric oxide synthesis. There was a direct correlation between the intracellular killing of the parasites and the production of nitric oxide by the macrophages. In contrast, there was no correlation between leishmanicidal activity and superoxide production by macrophages.

Cell-mediated immunity is deemed to be the major host defense mechanism against the protozoa parasite *Leishmania* spp. (1). For cutaneous leishmaniasis, IFN- γ secreted by the Th-1 subset of CD4 T cells (2-4) appears to be principally involved in activating macrophages for killing the intracellular parasites (5-8). Recently, it has been demonstrated that TNF- α can also mediate host-protection against cutaneous leishmaniasis (9, 10). Furthermore, the protective effect of TNF- α is associated with its ability to induce macrophage leishmanicidal activity in vitro (10) in a manner similar to that of IFN- γ .

It has recently been reported that IFN- γ -activated macrophages kill intracellular leishmania parasites by means of NO (11, 12). Currently, there has been much interest in the biologic role of NO³ (13). It is now generally accepted that NO is the endothelium-derived relaxing factor (14) and that it also participates in the regulation of the nervous and immune systems (13). Activated macrophages form NO₂⁻ and NO₃⁻ from the terminal guanidino nitrogen atoms of L-arginine (15, 16) by a process now known to proceed via the formation of NO (17-19). This pathway is inhibited by the L-arginine analog (L-NMMA) (15, 17-20), forms L-citrulline as a co-product (15, 17-

18, 21) and is responsible for the cytotoxic action of macrophages (22). In the leishmania system, the leishmanicidal activity of IFN- γ -treated macrophages can be completely inhibited by the addition of L-NMMA, an antagonist specific for the L-arginine → NO pathway (11, 12). Furthermore, *Leishmania major* promastigotes are killed when incubated at room temperature in PBS containing NO (12). The importance of NO in vivo is demonstrated by the finding that CBA mice infected with *L. major* developed exacerbated disease when L-NMMA was injected into the lesions (12).

We report here that TNF- α synergizes with IFN- γ in mediating host resistance against *L. major* infection in vivo and in inducing macrophage leishmanicidal activity in vitro. The leishmanicidal effect induced by the combination of TNF- α and IFN- γ can also be completely inhibited by L-NMMA, leading to a dose-dependent inhibition of NO production but enhanced respiratory burst. These data demonstrate that TNF- α synergizes with IFN- γ in mediating host resistance against *L. major* infection through NO, which is necessary for the macrophage killing of the intracellular parasite.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mice. CBA/T6T6 mice aged 8 to 10 wk were obtained from the colonies at Wellcome Biotech, Beckenham, Kent.

Parasites. The isolation, cultivation, and maintenance of the promastigote stage of the parasite *L. major* (LV39) have been described in detail elsewhere (23). For animal infection, groups of mice were injected s.c. (in 0.05 ml PBS) in the left hind footpad with 1×10^7 stationary-stage promastigotes. The lesion that developed in the footpads was measured with a dial calliper and expressed as footpad thickness increase ($\times 10^{-1}$ mm). In some experiments, 10^3 U of TNF- α , IFN- γ , a combination of the two cytokines in 20 μ l of PBS, or PBS alone was injected daily for 6 days into the lesion, starting from day 6 after infection. At the end of the experiment, the mice were sacrificed and the footpads removed. The parasite loads in the footpads were estimated by a method described by Heinzl et al. (4). Briefly, the footpad tissue was homogenized and supernatants containing the released parasites were serially diluted in Schneider's medium containing 30% FCS. Quadruplicate cultures were incubated at 28°C for 3 days and then pulsed with 1 μ Cl of [³H]TdR. Cultures were harvested 18 h later. The incorporation of radioactivity was counted in a β -counter (β -plate, LKB, Bromma, Sweden). The results were expressed as cpm at 10^{-1} dilution or the highest dilution (log 10) at which viable parasites are detectable (2 SD over background cpm of cultures without parasites).

Materials. L-NMMA and its enantiomer, D-NMMA, were generously provided by Dr. H. Hodson of the Department of Medicinal Chemistry, Wellcome Research Laboratories, Beckenham, U. K.; Murine rIFN- γ and murine rTNF- α were kindly provided by Dr. G. Adolf, Ernst Boehringer-Institute für Arzneimittel-Forschung, Vienna, Austria; LPS was obtained from Sigma, St. Louis, MO; and [³H]TdR was obtained from the Radiochemical Centre, Amersham U. K. (26 Ci/nmol).

Leishmanicidal assay. This has been described in detail elsewhere (24). Briefly, PEC were collected in culture medium (RPMI 1640 plus 10% FCS, L-glutamine, penicillin, and streptomycin) from CBA mice injected i.p. 6 days previously with 3 ml of a 2% sterile, hydrolyzed starch solution (BDH Chemicals, Poole, Dorset, UK). The

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⁴ Abbreviations used in this paper: NO, nitric oxide; L-NMMA, L-N^o monomethyl arginine; PEC, peritoneal exudate cells.

cells were plated at 1×10^5 cells/0.1 ml culture medium/well in 96-well flat bottom microtiter plates (Nunc, Roskilde, Denmark) and were incubated at 37°C in an atmosphere of 5% CO₂ in air for 24 h. Nonadherent cells were removed and the adherent cells washed three times with prewarmed medium. To each well was added 100 μ l of medium containing 10 ng/ml of LPS with or without TNF- α and IFN- γ . In some cultures, graded doses of L-NMMA or D-NMMA were also added. Cultures were then incubated as above for a further 2 to 4 h before addition into each well of 1×10^5 *L. major* promastigotes in 100 μ l of culture medium containing 10 ng/ml of LPS. The mixture was cultured for an additional 72 h. At the end of 72 h, 25 μ l of supernatant were removed from each well and kept at -20°C for the analysis of NO₂⁻ content and the cultures were washed extensively with prewarmed medium. To each well were added 100 μ l of 0.01% SDS solution in serum-free medium at 37°C for 20 to 30 min. Schneider's medium supplemented with 30% FCS and L-glutamine was added (100 μ l/well) and the cultures were incubated at 28°C for an additional 72 h. The cultures in three to six replicates were then pulsed with 1 μ Ci/well of [³H]TdR and the incorporation of radioactivity by viable parasites after 18 h of further culturing was determined as above.

In some experiments, the macrophage leishmanicidal activity was determined by visual counting of intracellular parasites as described in detail previously (24). Briefly, the CBA peritoneal cells obtained as above were dispensed into eight-well slides (Lab-Tek tissue culture chamber slides; Miles Laboratories, Naperville, IL) at 2×10^6 cells/0.2 ml culture medium/well. The slides were incubated for 6 h at 37°C and nonadherent cells removed by washing the wells three times with prewarmed medium. To each well were then added 200 μ l of medium containing 10 ng/ml of LPS and 40 U/ml of IFN- γ , 400 U/ml of TNF- α or a combinations of IFN- γ and TNF- α . Cultures were incubated for 4 h at 37°C and 5% CO₂ followed by addition into each well of 4×10^7 promastigotes/100 μ l of medium containing 10 ng/ml of LPS. At intervals of 2, 24, 48, and 72 h the slides were removed, washed in PBS (pH 7.2), and fixed for 10 min with 1% glutaraldehyde (BDH Chemicals, Poole, UK). After fixing, the cells were washed three times in distilled water and stained with 0.25% Giemsa (Gurr) for 90 min. They were then destined for 10 min in PBS (pH 7.2), washed twice in distilled water, dipped in acetone, in a 1/1 mixture of acetone and xylol, and finally dipped in xylol before being mounted in mountant (Gurr). Parasite killing was estimated by determining the number of intact parasites in 200 macrophages.

Measurement of NO₂⁻. NO₂⁻ in culture supernatants was determined by chemiluminescence as described previously (14).

Measurement of H₂O₂. H₂O₂ in the culture supernatant was assayed by a colorimetric method as described by Pick and Kelsari (25). PEC from mice stimulated i.p. 3 to 5 days previously with 3 ml of 2% hydrolyzed starch were dispensed into a 24-well Costar plate at 2.5×10^6 cells/1 ml in a culture medium (phenol red-free RPMI 1640 containing 10% FCS). The plate was incubated at 37°C and 5% CO₂ for 24 h. Nonadherent cells were removed by washing with prewarmed phenol red-free balanced salt solution. The macrophages were then treated with various concentrations of TNF- α and IFN- γ with or without L-NMMA/D-NMMA in the culture medium for 48 to 72 h at 37°C and 5% CO₂. At the end of the culture the cells were again washed with prewarmed balanced salt solution and to each well was added 1 ml of phenol red solution (140 mM NaCl, 10 mM potassium phosphate buffer (pH 7.0), 5.5 mM dextrose, 0.56 mM (0.2 g/liter) phenol red, and 19 U/ml (100 μ g/ml) of horseradish peroxidase and 10 μ g/ml of PMA. The plate was returned to the incubator for an additional hour. The cellfree supernatants were transferred to conical glass tubes and clarified by centrifugation for 5 min at 2000 \times g at 4°C. The supernatants were then brought up to pH 12 by addition of 10 μ l 1 N NaOH and read in a photometer at 600 nm. The results were referred to a standard curve and expressed as μ moles of H₂O₂ per 2.5×10^6 cells per 60 min.

RESULTS

Synergistic effect of TNF- α and IFN- γ on the disease development in CBA mice infected with *L. major*. CBA mice were infected in the footpad with 10^7 *L. major* promastigotes and injected in the same footpad with 10^3 U of TNF- α or 10^3 U of IFN- γ or a combination of the two cytokines. These doses of cytokines on their own were suboptimal in inducing disease-regression as determined in preliminary experiments. Thus, the lesions developed in mice receiving TNF- α alone or IFN- γ alone were not significantly different from those of the control mice similarly injected with PBS. In contrast, mice injected

with a combination of TNF- α and IFN- γ produced significantly smaller lesions and parasite loads compared with the controls (Table I).

Synergistic effect of TNF- α and IFN- γ in vitro. The synergistic effect of TNF- α and IFN- γ was also apparent in the induction of macrophage leishmanicidal activity in vitro. TNF- α at 400 U/ml did not activate macrophages to kill intracellular *L. major*. On the other hand, IFN- γ at 40 U/ml induced a significant but modest level of macrophage leishmanicidal activity. In contrast, macrophages treated with a combination of TNF- α and IFN- γ were highly effective in killing the intracellular parasite (Fig. 1 and Table II). This was demonstrated by the [³H]TdR incorporation method and the visual counting of surviving intracellular organisms. The treatment did not affect the parasite uptake by the macrophages because there was no apparent difference in the number of attached parasites examined 2 h after the infection. Some of the killed parasites were clearly visible with disintegrated membrane and cytoplasm.

Production of superoxide and NO by activated macrophages. The mechanism of the leishmanicidal activity of TNF- α - and IFN- γ treated macrophages was investigated. The supernatants of the macrophage cultures were analyzed for NO₂⁻ concentration, and the macrophages were stimulated with PMA to test for their ability to produce respiratory burst. The level of NO₂⁻ measured was indicative of NO production (14), whereas the contents of H₂O₂ examined reflected the O₂ released (25). Both IFN- γ and TNF- α alone were able to activate macrophages to produce NO and O₂⁻. However, whereas TNF- α and IFN- γ induced the production of NO synergistically, their effect on O₂⁻ production appeared to be only additive (Fig. 2).

Inhibition of macrophage leishmanicidal activity by L-NMMA. Mouse PEC were activated in vitro with TNF- α plus IFN- γ in the presence of L-NMMA or D-NMMA (0.5 to 500 μ M) and infected with *L. major* promastigotes. PEC treated with TNF- α + IFN- γ acquired a strong leishmanicidal activity compared with cells treated with the medium alone. However, the ability of the activated macrophages to kill *Leishmania* was progressively decreased and was completely abrogated at 50 μ M of L-NMMA (Fig. 3). In contrast, the leishmanicidal activity was not affected by the enantiomer, D-NMMA. Thus, the TNF- α + IFN- γ -induced macrophage leishmanicidal activity is completely inhibitable by a specific inhibitor of the L-arginine/NO pathway, indicating that the macrophage leishmanicidal activity in the present system is mediated by NO because NO₂⁻ has no effect on *L. major* promastigotes (12). In an earlier reports, L-NMMA was shown not to affect the uptake of *L. major* by macrophage (11, 12).

The inhibition of NO production by L-NMMA. The ability of TNF- α + IFN- γ -activated macrophages to kill intracellular leishmania was paralleled by an increase in NO₂⁻ in the culture supernatant (Figs. 3 and 4). The level of NO₂⁻ was progressively decreased in the culture supernatant of macrophages treated with increasing doses of L-NMMA but not D-NMMA (Fig. 4). Complete inhibition was achieved with 50 μ M of L-NMMA.

The enhancement of O₂⁻ production by L-NMMA. The ability of activated macrophages to produce O₂⁻ in the presence of L-NMMA and D-NMMA was also determined in parallel with the NO measurement. The level of H₂O₂

TABLE I
Synergistic effect of TNF- α and IFN- γ on the disease development in CBA mice infected with *L. major*

Treatment ^a	Lesion Size ($\times 10^{-1}$ mm)			Parasite Load (d49) ^b	
	d21	d35	d49	cpm ($\times 10^{-3}$)	Dilution
TNF- α	7.9 \pm 0.4	7.6 \pm 0.5	6.1 \pm 0.6	7.34 \pm 0.73	10 ³
IFN- γ	8.4 \pm 0.4	7.5 \pm 0.4	5.8 \pm 0.4	7.44 \pm 0.73	10 ³
TNF + IFN- γ	6.1 \pm 0.2 ^c	4.5 \pm 0.8	2.5 \pm 0.5	4.64 \pm 0.35	10 ¹
Control	8.6 \pm 0.4	8.2 \pm 0.6	5.4 \pm 0.5	7.32 \pm 0.61	10 ³

^a CBA mice were infected in the footpad with 10^7 *L. major* promastigotes, and from day 6 to day 13 after infection they were injected daily into the lesion with 10^3 U of IFN- γ , 10^3 U of TNF- α , or a combination of the two cytokines in 20 μ l of PBS. Control mice were injected with 20 μ l of PBS alone.

^b Parasite loads in the infected footpads were estimated as described in *Materials and Methods* and expressed as [³H]TdR incorporation and at the highest dilution in which viable parasites are detectable.

^c Figures italicized are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from controls (last line). Mean \pm SEM, $n = 5$. The results are representative of two experiments.

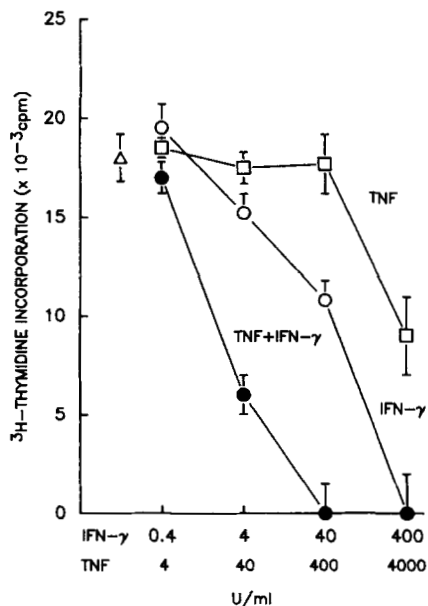


Figure 1. The activation of macrophage leishmanicidal activity by TNF- α , IFN- γ , or a combination of the two cytokines. For details, see *Materials and Methods*. Vertical bars = 1 SEM; $n = 3$. The data is representative of three similar experiments.

was progressively enhanced by L-NMMA but not by D-NMMA (Fig. 5). This is in agreement with an earlier report by Ding et al. (26). These results indicate that the leishmanicidal activity of activated macrophages in this system is not correlated with the production of superoxide anions.

DISCUSSION

Earlier reports demonstrate that TNF- α can mediate host resistance against *L. major* infection (9, 10). Mice developed exacerbated lesions when they were injected

with neutralizing doses of anti-TNF antibodies. Conversely, the lesions were significantly reduced when TNF- α was injected into the lesions. Furthermore, TNF- α was found to activate mouse peritoneal macrophages to kill intracellular *L. major* (10). In the present report, we extend these observations by showing that TNF- α can synergize with IFN- γ for the host resistance against cutaneous leishmaniasis.

The mechanism for the synergistic effects of TNF- α and IFN- γ in the present system is unclear. TNF alone, in the presence of LPS, is able to activate murine PEC to produce NO (27) (F. Y. Liew, Y. Li, and S. Millott, unpublished observations). TNF has been shown to synergize with IFN- γ in activating macrophage cytotoxicity against TNF-insensitive tumor target cells (27–31). Furthermore, IFN- γ was able to enhance the TNF secretion by LPS-treated monocytes (32). Whatever the mechanism, the combination of IFN- γ and TNF- α appears to be highly effective in activating macrophages for NO synthesis (26). The presence of LPS was found to be essential for the consistent activation of macrophages by IFN- γ and TNF. The precise role of LPS in this system is unclear. It may provide a priming signal for the activation pathway. The kinetics of the relative requirement of LPS, TNF, and IFN- γ in macrophage NO synthesis and leishmanicidal activity is currently under investigation.

The precise mechanism of NO-mediated killing of intracellular pathogen is at present unknown, but is likely to be similar to that described for macrophage-mediated lysis of tumor cells (33). In the cytolytic system, NO has been shown to react with the Fe-S groups resulting in the formation of iron-nitrosyl complex (18) causing the inactivation and degradation of Fe-S prosthetic groups of aconitase and complex I and complex II of the mitochondria electron transport chain. Although NO can assert direct cytostatic effects on tumor cells (18) and leish-

TABLE II
Synergistic effect of TNF- α and IFN- γ in the induction of macrophage leishmanicidal activity *in vitro*

Macrophages ^a Cultured with	[³ H]TdR ^b Incorporation ($\times 10^3$ cpm)	No. of <i>L. major</i> /100 Macrophages ^c		
		2 h	48 h	72 h
TNF- α (400 U/ml)	14.6 \pm 0.8	259 \pm 20	240 \pm 18	221 \pm 15
IFN- γ (40 U/ml)	8.2 \pm 0.7	301 \pm 25	175 \pm 10	15 \pm 2
TNF- α + IFN- γ	0.7 \pm 0.1	281 \pm 15		
Medium alone	15.1 \pm 1.2	275 \pm 15	245 \pm 21	289 \pm 25

^a Peritoneal macrophages were treated with TNF, IFN- γ , or a combination of the two cytokines at 400 U/ml and 40 U/ml, respectively. For details, see *Materials and Methods*.

^b [³H]TdR incorporation as a measurement of surviving parasite at the end of 72-h culture period. Mean \pm 1 SEM; $n = 6$. Data are pooled from two experiments.

^c Mean of three to four cultures \pm 1 SEM. Figures italicized are statistically different from controls (medium alone). Readings at 24 h were similar to those at 2 h.

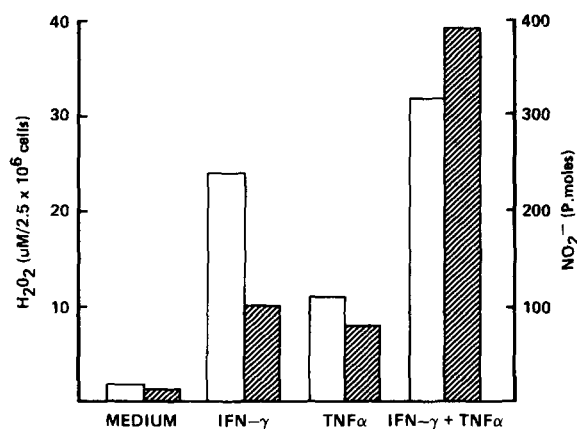


Figure 2. Production of H_2O_2 and NO_2^- by PEC activated with $TNF-\alpha$ and $IFN-\gamma$. For details see *Materials and Methods*. H_2O_2 (open columns) and NO_2^- (hatched columns) were determined in the pooled supernatants of three to four cultures.

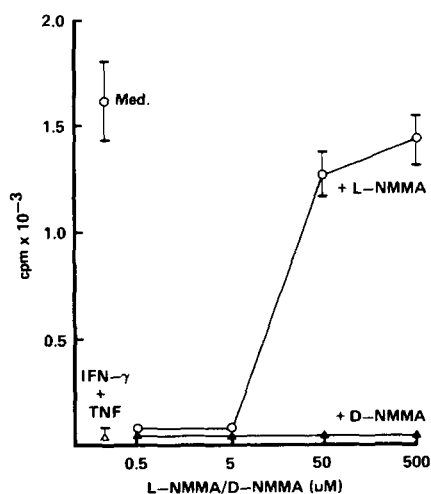


Figure 3. Effect of L-NMMA on the macrophage leishmanicidal activity induced by a combination of $IFN-\gamma$ (40 U/ml) and $TNF-\alpha$ (400 U/ml). The surviving parasites at the end of 72-h culture were quantitated by the uptake of $[^3H]TdR$. Vertical bars = 1 SEM; $n = 6$.

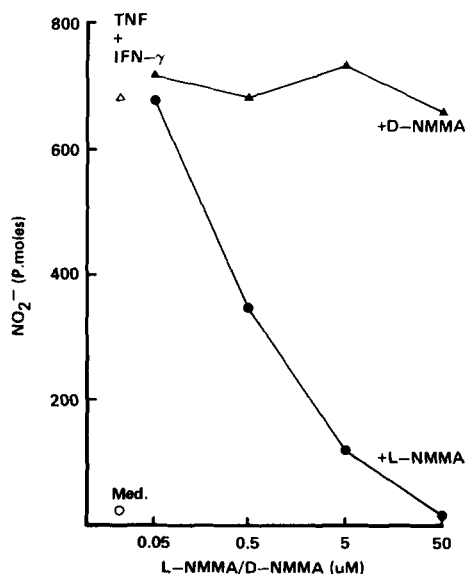


Figure 4. Inhibition of NO_2^- production by L-NMMA. Supernatants from the 72-h cultures described in Figure 2 were assayed for NO_2^- (14). Each point represents a pool of six cultures.

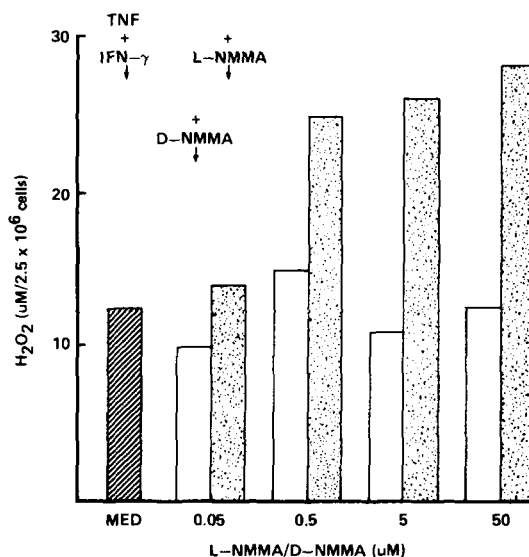


Figure 5. Effect of L-NMMA on H_2O_2 production by activated macrophages. PEC were treated with $TNF-\alpha$ (400 U/ml) + $IFN-\gamma$ (40 U/ml) in the absence (hatched column) or presence of various concentrations of L-NMMA (spotted columns) or D-NMMA (open columns). The culture supernatants were assayed for H_2O_2 (25). Each reading represents a pool of three cultures.

mania promastigotes (12) in vitro in the absence of macrophages, the hydroxyl radical (HO^\cdot) derived from O_2^- and NO may also be involved as suggested by Beckman et al. (34). In this model, NO reacts efficiently with O_2^- to form peroxynitrite anion ($ONOO^-$), which decays rapidly once protonated to form HO^\cdot and NO_2 (35). Hydroxyl radical is highly reactive combining with almost all molecules found in living cells with rate constants of 10^9 to $10^{10} M^{-1} s^{-1}$ (36).

Earlier reports indicated that H_2O_2 is the principal agent for killing *Leishmania donovani* in lymphokine-activated macrophages (37, 38). Catalase inhibited amastigote killing in a cellfree, acetaldehyde-xanthine oxidase system, indicating that H_2O_2 alone was sufficient to achieve leishmanicidal activity. This is in contrast to the *L. major* system in which respiratory burst is consistently shown not to be related with the killing of the parasites. Scott et al. (39) showed that *L. major* can be eliminated by a murine macrophage cell line, IC-21, which is deficient in the production of oxygen metabolites. The leishmanicidal activity of $IFN-\gamma$ -activated mouse PEC infected with *L. major* amastigotes can be completely inhibited by L-NMMA (11, 12) (J. Mauel, A. Ransijn, and Y. Buchmüller-Rouiller, personal communication). Here, we show that L-NMMA not only inhibits macrophage leishmanicidal activity and NO production but can also enhance H_2O_2 output by the macrophages (Fig. 5) (26). These results strongly suggest that NO rather than H_2O_2 is principally involved in the killing of *L. major*. However, the data reported here do not exclude the possibility that killing of early logarithmic growth phase promastigotes may well involve respiratory oxygen intermediates produced by normal macrophages (unactivated by cytokines), whereas those parasites that survive this initial defense (amastigotes) are only destroyed by cytokine activated-macrophages involving NO. The relative role of NO in the *L. donovani* system is at present unclear.

Granger et al. (40) first demonstrated that macrophages

activated with IFN- γ and LPS have a cystostatic effect in vitro for the fungal pathogen *Cryptococcus neoformans* through the production of NO. Macrophage cytotoxicity against schistosomula of *Schistosoma mansoni* also involves arginine-dependent production of reactive nitrogen intermediates (41). The same mechanism also appears to be involved in the macrophage microbiostatic capacity for *Toxoplasma gondii* (42). The role of NO in other infectious diseases, including bacterial and virus infections, will no doubt be revealed in the near future.

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