

Kurds take to the hills

From Richard Wallis
in Tehran

In the mountains of Kurdistan, a group of officers who recently deserted from the Iranian armed forces are busy training Kurdish rebels to fight against Government troops.

It is part of the new guerrilla war which became inevitable after the regular army and Islamic Revolutionary Guards recaptured all the towns held by Kurdish insurgents, forcing them to take to the hills.

Three months ago, Colonel Esmail Aliar, a Kurd, was a staff officer in Tehran. Now he has discarded his special forces uniform as an Iranian ranger, for the typical outfit of the Kurdish Pesh Merga (those who Face Death) guerrillas—a Soviet-made Kalashnikov, a black-and-white headscarf and baggy trousers.

What makes Colonel Aliar even more exceptional is that he was one of the few officers in Ayatollah Khomeini's military committee at the time of the February revolution. The committee took over the monarchy's shattered armed forces in the name of Iran's new revolutionary leader.

Rapidly disillusioned with the course of revolution, Col-

onel. Aliar gave up his job as an assistant to former chief-of-staff General Nasser Farbod three months ago.

Now he is on the military staff of the banned Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), which is leading the underground Kurdish resistance movement on Iran's western border.

He was spending the night in one of the many Kurdish hillside villages kept under observation by Government helicopters. With him were two other officers, his brother—a major and a Colonel Rabi'i, who said he had deserted 10 days ago.

The Kurdish insurgents lost the conventional war against the Government forces in 18 days.

After the fall of the last Kurdish stronghold, the border town of Sardasht, the insurgents disappeared into the mountains. They abandoned armaments, including field guns.

In the freshly recaptured barracks in the former rebel capital of Mahabad, army officers estimated there were still 50,000 armed Kurds hiding in the mountains.

One of Iran's most wanted men, KDP secretary-general Abdur-Rahman Qassemloo said in an interview in another vil-

lage near Sardasht that this was probably an exaggeration.

"We have not been defeated. The fall of the towns is not the end of the war, it is the beginning of a new stage. We have not even begun our war."

The KDP has established a secret base for guerrilla operations somewhere in the Kurdish mountains, according to Dr Qassemloo, who said it planned to launch guerrilla raids on towns.

Much of the insurgents' confidence is derived from the success of their kinsmen across the Iraqi border, who have fought a guerrilla war against the Soviet-armed Baghdad Government since 1961.

Some of the lower rank KDP officials appear less sanguine about their chances of victory against the Government forces.

"If winter comes, we must find caves. We are not ready yet and it will be very difficult," one said.

According to some KDP estimates there are only a few hundred real Pesh Merga. Most of the others are volunteers quartered in villages where winter always brings supply problems.

They also lack radio communications, making large-scale coordinated actions near-impossible.

